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**A Comparative Study of the Responses of Three Highland  
Communities to the Disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843.**

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**Thesis Submitted to the Open University in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree  
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## **ABSTRACT.**

This study, positioned within the historiography of the Disruption, is responding to a recognised need for pursuing local studies in the search for explanations for reactions to the Disruption. Accepting the value of comparison and contextualisation and assuming a case study approach, it has selected three particular Highland communities in order to discover how they actually responded to the Disruption and why. Contrasting responses to the event furnished the determinant for selection, the parish being the elected geographical dimension since the relationship to a specific church and minister can be readily determined. In the attempt to discover why reactions differed the exploration of the dynamics of life in each community, the multiplicity, complexity and interplay between factors operating at this level to elicit specific responses, should likewise point to the varying applicability of broad generalisations in local contexts.

To contextualise the thesis, the rationale for the study is preceded by an exploration into the historiography of the Disruption. A description of the local scenario around the time of the event ensues, followed by chapters presenting evidence concerning the environment experienced by parishioners, acknowledging the comparative aspect. The socio-economic background covers such information as population distribution, occupational profiles and domestic milieu and the cultural milieu absorbs elements such as education, language, perceived behavioural characteristics, customs and beliefs. The religious scene incorporates material on history, physical settings for worship and bodies or individuals of influence. The noteworthy themes of spirituality, revivals and ministers and their kinship networks are then given specific consideration. The study concludes with a summary of the web of factors contributing to responses to the Disruption in the three parishes and a systematic comparison of the applicability therein of the various hypotheses outlined in the introduction.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.**

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## CHAPTER 1. CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY.

### 1. Background to the Disruption.

On May 18<sup>th</sup> 1843 numerous ministers and elders of the Church of Scotland 'left St. Andrew's Church in George Street in Edinburgh, which was the meeting place of the 1843 General Assembly.....and marched down to Tanfield Hall in Canonmills. There they constituted the first Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland.'<sup>1</sup> Ansdell affirms that approximately 470 of the 1195 Church of Scotland ministers seceded and that shortly afterwards 800 congregations of this newly established denomination existed within Scotland, numbering between 750,000 and 800,000 people.<sup>2</sup> Although these figures are admittedly approximations and other writers furnish slight variations, Lynch, for example, quoting a figure of 454 seceding ministers<sup>3</sup> and Burleigh asserting that 451 out of 1203 ministers left the Establishment,<sup>4</sup> nevertheless they provide a good indication of the scale of this well-documented event.

In recent years there has been a shift in the historiography of the Disruption away from a concern with competing causal hypotheses to a more holistic concern with reconstructing the mosaic of influences and factors contributing to the split within the church. Investigation of such factors has been undertaken on both a nationwide basis, as, for instance, in the work of Drummond and Bulloch, and also on a regional or more local level, as exemplified in the studies by Hillis and MacLaren. Spiritual, disputes over religious practices, religio-political, socio-political, socio-economic and cultural facets are among the elements which have been identified, specific examples including the spiritual headship of the Church, the legacy of the Covenants, the influence of the Enlightenment, theological disputes, changes in socio-

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<sup>1</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998a), p.62.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>3</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), p.397.

<sup>4</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.352.

economic structures and the political climate, as well as the precipitating 'triggers' sparking off the walk out led by Chalmers. Patronage was a particularly divisive issue. This system gave the recognised patron, often a major landowner or the Crown, the right of presenting a minister to the parish church without recourse to parishioners' wishes. William and Mary removed this right at the time of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1690, when the General Assembly finally replaced bishops as the apex of the church courts. However, an Act of Queen Anne (1712) restored patronage.

The issue of patronage and the question of the state's role in religion are reflected in the secessions which occurred during the eighteenth century, although it can be broadly argued that Protestantism is 'potentially more fissile than Catholicism because almost anyone can lay claim to legitimate authority.'<sup>5</sup> According to Donaldson, the First or Original Secession Church, a development of 1733, parted from the Establishment on the basis of 'conservative theology and a revival of the Covenants.'<sup>6</sup> Hume Brown, however, considers the initial stimulus was controversy over a patronage anomaly concerning the 'respective rights of patrons and congregations in the election of ministers.'<sup>7</sup> Lynch concurs, noting that the Church of Scotland deposed the breakaway group under Ebenezer Erskine in 1740. Nonetheless he acknowledges their Covenanting links by observing that they celebrated in 1743 by renewing the 'Solemn League and Covenant at its centenary.'<sup>8</sup> By the close of the century, these significant dissenters had embraced differing and complex attitudes within their eventual four-fold split. Firstly, between 1745 and 1747 the 'Anti-Burghers' split from the 'Burghers', contending that the religious affirmation in the burgess oath 'implied an acceptance of the establishment.' Secondly, by the end of the century a further division had

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce, Steve (1985), p.592.

<sup>6</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1993), p.194.

<sup>7</sup> Hume Brown, P. (1911), p.425.

<sup>8</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), p.399.



emerged, each section dividing into 'Old Light' and 'New Light' groups over a seemingly academic question for a non-established church, that of the 'power of the magistrate in matters of religion and the duty of the state to enforce ecclesiastical discipline.'<sup>9</sup>

The second secession occurred in 1761. Patronage disputes were the root cause of the formation of this body, known as the Relief Church. Its 'adherents were temperamentally far removed from the Seceders' and, although 'Evangelical in doctrine,' it possessed a more liberal attitude to membership than the earlier body, which claimed Covenant exclusivity. Indeed it suggested that its members 'were still in full communion with the Established Church.'<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless the Relief Church 'represented the 'voluntary' principle,' each church and minister being the responsibility of individual congregations and state support not being sought.<sup>11</sup>

A movement which could be regarded as displaying a less complete break from the Church is that of the North Highland Separatists. Although a similar movement originated in Inverness-shire, many Separatists were based in the Synod of Sutherland and Caithness. This Synod attempted to 'put down' the Public Fellowship Meetings or Conferences held on the Fridays of Communion Seasons, a practice firmly established by the mid-eighteenth century. Dissatisfaction simmered for some time, finally breaking into open dissension when the Reverend Alexander Sage of Kildonan attempted to hold a private communion, for his parish only, in about 1797. Those who had been called upon to "speak to the Question" in the Friday meetings became natural leaders of a protest which 'meant to keep itself within the Church,' basically displaying displeasure in the affected parishes at the 'settlement of unacceptable presentees.' Although holding their own meetings rather than worshipping at the Parish

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<sup>9</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1993), p.194.

<sup>10</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), p.400.

<sup>11</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1993), p.194.

Church they attended Communion Services and generally obtained the 'ordinance of baptism' from the ministers.<sup>12</sup>

A century after the first secession, during the pre-Disruption conflict, the dissenting churches in Scotland were loudly proclaiming the virtues of the voluntary principle, and attacking the concept of ecclesiastical establishments. Arguments against establishment include such phrases as 'inconsistent with the nature of religion' and 'the spirit of the Gospel' and such claims as its tendency to 'destroy the unity and purity of the Church, and disturb the peace and order of civil society.'<sup>13</sup> Dissenters believed that a State Church was unjust and a 'spiritual crime,' only a church based on voluntary aid being legitimately a 'Scriptural Church.'<sup>14</sup>

Patronage, state control, theology and the Covenants have thus been cited as elements in decisions to secede from the Establishment. However, the pre-Disruption conflict alluded to in the previous paragraph, although undoubtedly reflecting such dissensions and the influence of such bodies, was essentially a crisis faced by those who had remained members of the Established Church.

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, a division had been gradually developing within the Church of Scotland, two distinct parties emerging, the Evangelicals or Popular Party and the Moderates. Attempts to define their essential characteristics are fraught with difficulties, due both to blurring of distinctions and a tendency for descriptions to be emotive and biased. However, Evangelicals generally represented a greater puritanism in religious life.<sup>15</sup> They 'agonised over doctrine,' particularly the issues of predestination and universal atonement,<sup>16</sup> adhering to strict Calvinist doctrines, especially with regard to predestination.<sup>17</sup> Rait affirms

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<sup>12</sup> Macleod, Principal John (1965), pp.78-84.

<sup>13</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.335.

<sup>14</sup> Hume Brown, P. (1911), p.425.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, Callum (1988), p.147.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>17</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1993), p.194.



that they 'regarded themselves as the inheritors of the traditions of John Knox,' adding that 'they were certainly the disciples of Andrew Melville and Alexander Henderson,'<sup>18</sup> an observation tying in with the assertion that they were 'non-intrusionist',<sup>19</sup> unhappy with state interference in spiritual affairs. Impassioned sermons appear to have been the norm. Evangelicalism emphasised the need for conversion, the necessity for both spreading and living the gospel message, the recognition of inherent sin and the centrality of the Bible and the cross.<sup>20</sup>

The religion of the Moderates, however, tended to be seen as displaying more social and moral attributes than that of the Evangelicals, placing less emphasis on personal salvation, intense sermons or the catechising of parishioners.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in worship they 'favoured a lightening of the puritan yoke,' seeming to their opponents to be 'lukewarm' in their religion,<sup>22</sup> abhorring 'enthusiasm.'<sup>23</sup> Having a tendency to pursue elegance and refinement, they were often seen by critics as being too interested in the social graces and intellectual activity and in maintaining a social position rather than proclaiming the gospel.<sup>24</sup> During the eighteenth century Scottish Enlightenment, although playing a 'notable part in the intellectual activity,' they contributed little to theology.<sup>25</sup> Appealing to reason as much as to emotion, Moderates espoused a belief in the 'wholeness' of man, seeing him not in the abstract but within society and believing that if 'man-in-society needs the leaven of religion,' then 'man-in-Church needs the disciplines of society.' Although desiring the Church to have freedom from its 'bondage to government

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<sup>18</sup> Rait, Robert S. (1929), p.309.

<sup>19</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.336.

<sup>20</sup> Bebbington, D. W. (1993), pp.2-3 and 11-15.

<sup>21</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998a), pp.48-49.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, Callum (1998), p.67.

<sup>23</sup> Pryde, George S. (1962), p.183.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, Callum (1988), p.147.

<sup>25</sup> Sefton, Henry (1993), eds., p.596.



‘managers’ and sectional interests,’ they considered patronage was a necessary price to pay ‘for their ideal of a Church occupying a central place in the national life.’<sup>26</sup>

Differentials between the two parties lay in theological emphases as well as in the practice of religion, but it has been strongly argued that patronage constituted the ‘sharpest conflict between the Church parties.’<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this ‘most explicit bone of contention’ between them formed the ‘subject of endless appeals and debates in the Assembly.’<sup>28</sup> The Moderates considered that ‘patronage was the law of the land’ and that the Church, being responsible for licensing ministerial candidates, must be liable if a presentee is a ‘loose liver or of unsound faith.’ For no other reason could a presentee be rejected. The Evangelicals maintained that the congregational ‘call,’ regarded by Moderates as ‘an empty form,’ was an essential ingredient in the selection process<sup>29</sup> and that the Patronage Act of 1712 had not overruled congregational objection and presbyterial adjudication.<sup>30</sup>

The political climate exacerbated the situation. The French Revolution instilled a sense of caution and conservatism into government and other official institutions, but the political awakening and democratic aspirations associated with its early days ‘encouraged a new humanitarianism more in tune with the warmth of the Evangelicals than the coolness of the Moderates.’ Conflict arose in the sphere of foreign mission and church extension, both espoused eagerly by the Evangelicals, inspired from the 1820s by Thomas Chalmers. Supplementing the legally established parish system in order to provide religious ordinances in areas ill-served or experiencing population expansion was regarded with alarm by Moderates, who foresaw congregations withdrawing from ‘their legal parish ministers.’ Patronage,

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<sup>26</sup> Clark, Ian. D. L. (1970), pp.207-209.

<sup>27</sup> Pryde, George S. (1962), p.177.

<sup>28</sup> Clark, Ian D. L. (1970), p.206.

<sup>29</sup> Pryde, George S. (1962), p.177.

<sup>30</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.337.

seemingly 'contrary to the liberal thought' advocating 'popular rights in the franchise' as well as apparently perpetuating the domination of the Moderates,<sup>31</sup> became even more hotly contested as the days of the Reform Bill of 1832 drew near. Additionally, religious awakenings and emerging movements such as the Oxford Movement in England, initiated by Keble's sermon attacking the 'very idea of State intervention' and claiming 'spiritual freedom for the Church,'<sup>32</sup> lent weight to the dissatisfactions of the Evangelicals.

Consequently discord escalated during the early nineteenth century, culminating in the crisis period known as the Ten Years' Conflict. In 1834 the Moderates lost the controlling position in the General Assembly, the Evangelicals seizing their opportunity as majority party to pass the Veto Act. This claimed the congregational right to veto a patron's ministerial choice,<sup>33</sup> although its sponsors asserted that its 'object was to curb abuses of patronage, not to abolish it.' They had 'abandoned the attempt to restore significance to the call,' considering the existing legal framework to contain some recognition of popular rights.<sup>34</sup> However, the Moderates generally backed the Court of Session's position that a patron's right of nomination was unassailably embodied in civil law, the Veto Act being unacceptable because it represented the 'church operating beyond its sphere of authority and interfering in civil affairs.'<sup>35</sup> The civil courts argued that the church, having been created by statute was therefore 'subordinate to the state.' The Evangelicals, however, considered the church a 'spiritual creation,' which, although having state recognition, possessed its own sphere of jurisdiction, namely in spiritual affairs. It was the Melvillian argument of the spiritual headship of Christ.

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<sup>31</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1993), p.195.

<sup>32</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.335.

<sup>33</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), p.401.

<sup>34</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.339.

<sup>35</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998a), p.61.



Ansdell neatly summarises the problem as lying in the 'definition of the duties and responsibilities of the two spheres of church and state.'<sup>36</sup>

Although surprisingly few legal disputes arose over patronage following the Veto Act, Auchterarder, Lethendy and Marnoch being the major sources of bitter legal wrangling, they adversely affected political support for the Evangelicals' campaign. Additional controversy surrounded the Chapels Act, whereby chapels of ease already erected or to be established under the church extension scheme would be recognised as 'parish churches *quoad sacra*.' As such they would be assigned 'parochial bounds,' could appoint kirk sessions and give their ministers full standing in church courts. In 1839 this was also declared illegal, following a civil action by local heritors in the Court of Session when this right was conferred on a former 'Old Light Burger' minister in Stewarton, Ayrshire, who had brought his congregation back into the Church of Scotland.<sup>37</sup> As many Evangelical ministers occupied such church extension charges, this ruling weakened their party in church courts.

In 1842 the General Assembly, frustrated by continuing state interference, passed the 'Claim of Right.' This asserted its spiritual independence, 'taking its stand on statements in the Westminster Confession regarding the Sole Headship of Christ over His Church and the independent jurisdiction in matters spiritual' and quoting 'parliamentary Acts recognizing and ratifying that jurisdiction.'<sup>38</sup> Rejection by civil courts and Government followed, conciliatory parliamentary attempts by the Earl of Aberdeen, the Duke of Argyll and Sir George Sinclair failing to give satisfaction or receive ratification in the Houses of Parliament. Lynch contends that such attempts to find a compromise legislative formula failed principally because the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp.61-62.

<sup>37</sup> Burleigh, J.H.S. (1960), pp.340 and 347.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.(1960), pp. 347 and 349.



parties concerned did not really understand each other's position.<sup>39</sup> It was a complex issue of non-intrusion and spiritual independence, and, as the Evangelicals, or non-intrusionists, found the Court of Session still encroaching on the church, a considerable number decided to leave the Establishment. Thus the seeds were sown for the Disruption, Chalmers affirming that 'they had quit on Establishment principles – they were not Voluntaries.'<sup>40</sup> Preparations for this possible eventuality had been underway since a Convocation of Evangelical ministers, which had been held in Edinburgh the preceding November. Consequently, the business of establishing a nation-wide Free Church could proceed immediately.

This brief outline does not attempt to address all the complexities and debates surrounding the event, merely to contextualise the material to be discussed in this study. The Disruption, a term seemingly appropriate for a happening which disrupted life in many communities, had a considerable impact across the country both in terms of religious provision and also in the delivery of former responsibilities of the Established Church, such as social welfare, poor relief and education. The level of impact was at its lowest in the countryside of the Lowlands and the Borders and in the newly developing industrial towns and mining areas, and at its most significant in the large cities, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen, as well as in the Highlands.<sup>41</sup> Ansdell, indeed, claims that it has 'frequently been suggested that the Disruption was quite distinct in the Highlands and the Hebrides' in 'terms of scale, intensity and appeal,' adding that Evangelical Christianity was judged to be a new feature in Highland life, the Disruption occurring when this movement was 'perceived to be fresh and young' and

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<sup>39</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), p.401.

<sup>40</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), p.354.

<sup>41</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), pp.397-398.

consequently the 'Free Church provided the institutional structure to contain this new impulse.'<sup>42</sup>

## **2. The Historiography of the Disruption.**

Developments in the historiography of the Disruption reflect broader changes in the practice of history. There are many ways of looking at the past and from the eighteenth century right through to the 'post-modern world the past has been looked at differently by having been constantly redescribed.'<sup>43</sup>

Burke identifies a broad base of change between 'old' and 'new' history, which, although somewhat sweeping, does serve to highlight specific aspects of historical writing. The traditional paradigm, or conceptual framework, centred its concerns on the state and institutions, whereas the new history embraces 'virtually every human activity.' A conventional distinction between central and peripheral is thus undermined. 'Analysis of structures' has taken over from a 'narrative of events,' 'history from below' has been adopted, concerning 'ordinary people' not just elites, outstanding men and great deeds, and evidential variety has been substituted for total reliance on documents. The traditional paradigm concentrated on events, whereas collective movements and trends are also included in the new history, which has shed the notion of objectivity as being unrealistic and has allowed for prejudices and recognised that the 'presentation of opposite viewpoints enhances understanding.'<sup>44</sup> The effect of these trends in religious history, the subject field of this study, is noted by Hufton, who maintains that even in the late 1950s it was basically 'largely political

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<sup>42</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998a), pp.69 and 71.

<sup>43</sup> Jenkins, Keith (1991), pp.3, 5, 6-7, 65 and 70.

<sup>44</sup> Burke, Peter (1993), pp.3-7 and 9.



history,' whereas by the early 1960s there had been a shift to the view of the 'consumer', the congregation, which widened the 'framework of reference.'<sup>45</sup>

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a growing influence of the social sciences on the practice of history.<sup>46</sup> By the 1960s social history began to focus on 'all sectors of population, social institutions,' 'social structure' on a microcosmic level, as well as 'social rituals, mores and beliefs.'<sup>47</sup> This fragmentation or splintering is related by Hufton to religious history, in which studies began to focus on such issues as popular devotion, pilgrimages and the rites of passage.<sup>48</sup> In attempting to interpret, where explanation was not possible, 'thick description' evolved, under the influence of Clifford Geertz.<sup>49</sup>

The illustrative overview of the historiography of the Disruption, paving the way for exploring the rationale behind this current study, will concentrate on specialist histories, principally religious, although works placing the Disruption within the context of other fields, such as socio-economic trends or Gaelic culture, will be included. Additionally, there will be some cursory references made initially to certain general histories which have addressed the Disruption within their pages.

It will be seen that the historiography of the Disruption reflects a number of the trends briefly outlined above and that these tend to fit into a chronological sequence. Initially, the emphasis was on religio-political explanations, with allusions to the wider political scene. The socio-economic and socio-political angles became notably identifiable from the middle decades of the twentieth century onwards, sociological, cultural and philosophical arguments entering the

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<sup>45</sup> Hufton, Olwen (2002), pp.57-59.

<sup>46</sup> Rubin, Miri (2002), p.82.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>48</sup> Hufton, Olwen (2002), pp.62-63 and 68-71.

<sup>49</sup> Rubin, Miri (2002), pp.84 and 86.



arena in recent years. These trends are more striking in the specialist than in the general histories.

Hume Brown, whose work was published in 1911, does indeed concentrate on religio-political explanations, although contextualising these within the political movements and influences of the day, such as the campaign for electoral reform.<sup>50</sup> However, although Pryde, writing in 1962, addresses some socio-economic issues, including the problems of poverty, he still concentrates on religio-political forces, patronage and the non-intrusion case figuring large in his arguments.<sup>51</sup> Ferguson (1968), on the other hand, although still arguing within a traditional paradigm of state and institutions, broadens out even further from religio-political issues into contextualising the Disruption within the nineteenth century questioning of the whole framework of society, including political systems, throughout Europe.<sup>52</sup>

Mitchison, whose general history was first published in 1970, acknowledges the increasing interest in economic history and in a 'new type of social history' by positioning religion firmly within society, but still places much emphasis on religious and religio-political arguments. However, she contextualises the Disruption in a broad social and political as well as religious framework, recognising the significance of 'structures,' both responsive and reactionary, as much as events.<sup>53</sup> Arguments propounded by Donaldson in his general history, initially published in 1974, tend to reflect those of fellow historians of the period, although issues concerning the socio-political climate do not appear to carry as much weight with him as religio-political factors.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hume Brown, P. (1911), pp.370-371 and 423-425.

<sup>51</sup> Pryde, George S. (1962), pp.177-180 and 183-186.

<sup>52</sup> Ferguson, William (1968), pp.305, 307-308 and 310.

<sup>53</sup> Mitchison, Rosalind (2002), pp.xi-xii and 381-386.

<sup>54</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1993), pp.194 and 196.

Lynch, writing in the last decade of the twentieth century, proposes a variety of contributory factors to the event, covering principally socio-economic and religio-political forces. Issues surrounding the relationship of the Church with both state and society figure strongly within his arguments.<sup>55</sup> Devine, in his general history of the period 1700-2000, published in the latter year, submits a wide range of explanations for the impact of the Disruption, particularly in the Highlands, embracing socio-economic, religio-political and spiritual elements. They include his interpretation of the event as displaying 'the greatest single collective act of defiance of landlordism,' (within its limited sphere), the personal and emotional nature of evangelical faith and the leadership of *Na Daoine* ('The Men'), as well as the more general notion of the 1842 'Claim of Right' as constituting a 'statement of Scottish religious principles.'<sup>56</sup>

Concentrating now on the specialist histories, in exploring historiographical explanations for the adherence of ministers and people to the newly established Free Church of Scotland, particular attention will be paid to those having a direct bearing on the situation in the Highlands, the geographical area in which this study is embedded. Nonetheless, church historians especially have tended to offer views embracing the whole Scottish nation, the relevance of which may be more pertinent to relatively 'sophisticated' urban settings than to rural areas. To assist in contextualising the differing responses across the country noted by Lynch some city-based examples will be explored briefly. An additional point requiring to be borne in mind throughout this study is the balance between change, in the sense of the drama surrounding the steps leading to the Ten Years' Conflict and the ultimate Disruption, and continuity, in terms of gradual processes of altering relationships, norms, needs and attitudes, especially in Highland society, noted for its traditional networks of loyalty.

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<sup>55</sup> Lynch, Michael (1992), pp.397-401.

<sup>56</sup> Devine, T.M. (2000), pp.103-104, 106, 291 and 426.



During the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth a number of writers portrayed the causal factors of the Disruption as being spiritual and religio-political. In the earlier post-Disruption decades the Free Church produced more written material than the Established Church, in the form of histories, biographies, journals and newspapers, all promoting 'self-advertisement and self-justification.'<sup>57</sup> Suggestions of reunion following the abolition of patronage by Disraeli's Conservative government in 1874 led Candlish and his sympathisers in the Free Church to take the offensive and insist that patronage had not been the essential issue of the Disruption, but spiritual independence. At this auspicious moment the Reverend Thomas Brown's work on the Disruption was first published (1883), to 'bring back into congregational consciousness such poignant reminders of the struggles of the infant Free Church.'<sup>58</sup> Brown, a Free Church minister, emphasises the spiritual independence of the Church, Christ's headship of this body and its inability to accept state usurpation. He sees the creation of the Free Church as bearing witness to the principle of the 'spiritual freedom and independence of the Church under Christ, her only Head.' This battle for the 'Crown Rights of the Redeemer' had been fought at the Reformation and during the Covenanting period. Intrusion by the state, embodied in the issue of patronage, was unacceptable to the Evangelicals, although accepted by the Moderates, and was a precipitating factor in the Disruption.<sup>59</sup> The joyous tones of the work and the employment of such emotive words as 'sacrifice,' 'religious earnestness' and 'enthusiastic devotedness' reflect the author's religious bias as well as the theoretical framework for his arguments.

The religio-political construct is affirmed by John Mackay in his Chalmers lecture (?1914). He contends that, pre-1843, ministers and people in the Highlands exhibited an increasing desire

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<sup>57</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), pp.118-121.

<sup>58</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), pp. 118-121 and 123.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, Reverend Thomas (1892), pp. 150, 159, 615 and 620.



for spiritual liberty regarding choice of ministers and also for Church Courts to possess the freedom to act on behalf of its Head, the Lord, in spiritual matters. Mackay, whose perspective favours the lowland mission impulse, also maintains that religious organisations, such as The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home and Gaelic School Societies, as well as certain missionaries, including the Haldane brothers, local lay preachers, especially 'The Men', and individual ministers all acted as key players in creating an environment of evangelicalism.<sup>60</sup> Such an environment served to promote the significance of the religio-political issues outlined above, as well as demonstrating the existence of a gradual continuum of change over some decades prior to the Disruption.

Interestingly, the Reverend Dr. Norman Macleod in his biographical sketch of his father, Norman Macleod, D. D., who died in 1862, identifies a fervent spirit among Highlanders at the time of the Disruption, regarding spiritual excitement as a driving force behind the events of 1843.<sup>61</sup> He does not enter the religio-political arena. Neither does Sir Archibald Geikie, the geologist, who offers a pastoral explanation for reaction to the Disruption in Highland communities. His travels in the Highlands and Islands during the mid- nineteenth century led him to comment that reaction in each parish was likely to have reflected the ability and efficiency of the minister.<sup>62</sup> The centrality of religion in Highlanders' lives and their vision of the minister as the 'stern oracle of the truth' is considered by Macpherson, in his 1946 introduction to a work of Alexander Mackenzie, as significant in terms of their compulsion to follow clergymen as they once followed their clan chiefs.<sup>63</sup> Such allusions to individual variations help to underline the significance of approaching the subject of the Disruption from a local and comparative perspective.

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<sup>60</sup> Mackay, John (?1914), pp.227-270.

<sup>61</sup> Clerk, the Reverend A., ed. (1910), p.xxxvi.

<sup>62</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), p.96.

<sup>63</sup> Mackenzie, Alexander (1946), p.xi.

Another late-nineteenth century writer, the Reverend Norman Walker, identifying trends in the Highlands, within his predominantly generalist arguments makes some interesting and valid points, principally relating to the spiritual arena, but showing an awareness of cultural and behavioural characteristics of Highland people. He asserts that their inherent disposition to 'move in masses,' either from a 'Celtic' tendency towards a 'sympathetic nature' or 'the habit of following leaders' inherited, as Macpherson noted, from traditional clan loyalty to the chief, predisposed them to be prepared for the Disruption. Although affection for the Church of their Fathers prevented allegiance to dissenting bodies it guided them into the Free Church, which they considered to represent the true Church of their Fathers. Adding a historical prevalence in the region to support evangelical religion, Walker's arguments for their religious adherence embrace a mixture of tradition and spiritual belief. Such arguments, coupled with the influence of religious revivals and a religious earnestness of the people,<sup>64</sup> tend to suggest the existence of ongoing movements within the area permitting widespread support for the Disruption – continuity rather than change.

In the wider arena of the nation, Walker pays considerable attention to religio-political theories, constructing a metanarrative within the traditional paradigm. He acknowledges the steps leading to the Disruption, identifying the vehement propounding of the principle of non-intrusion in spiritual matters as a reaction to the civil courts' response to the Veto Act. Defining the limits of the powers of Church and state was problematical, as was the fact that the laws of contract between the parties had been broken by the Patronage Act of 1712, to which the Church had steadfastly objected. However, Walker asserts that, although 'it is customary' to submit that wholly 'spiritual causes' were at the root of the changes leading to the formation of the Free Church, it is vital to contextualise these within the 'electric condition

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<sup>64</sup> Walker, Reverend Norman (preface dated 1895), pp.130-132 and 147.



of the age' and the 'strength of movements towards recognition of popular rights.' The Evangelicals, rather than the reactionary Moderates, recognised the 'stirrings of a new life,' the 'political agitation' that led to the Reform Bill, the start of the 'era of democracy,' the sense of 'popular election' being a 'right' rather than merely 'reasonable' and the consequent effect that the new powers given to the people would have within the framework of the Church.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, although religion still constituted the central focus of people's lives, its essence and practice could not be divorced from movements occurring within political, social and intellectual spheres.

Similarly, Withrington asserts that Hector Macpherson, whose work entitled *Scotland's Battles for Spiritual Independence* was published in 1905, likewise places the Disruption at the end of a long struggle, initiated at the Reformation, which had developed into a cry for 'popular rights and democratic principles,' religious liberty not the "second-rate question" of patronage being the key principle involved. An 'English-dominated British parliament' was unable to come to terms with these issues. Thus the "real" Disruption was 'an extraordinary amalgam of ecclesiastical independency, Scottish nationalism, and political radicalism,' displaying an 'attack on the constitutional absolutism of parliamentary sovereignty' and acting as an 'advance signal in Britain of the new political theory of co-ordinate jurisdictions in the modern state.'<sup>66</sup>

Burleigh, many of whose views have been incorporated in the first section of this chapter, appears to have come out of the same stable as Walker and Macpherson, although his work on Scottish church history was not published until 1960. Although incorporating much detail on the stages of the Ten Years' Conflict into his arguments, he commences by acknowledging the influence of the Reform Bill on 'all aspects of the national life,' including the religious arena.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp.1-6, 7-8 and 10-12.

<sup>66</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), pp. 131-132.

He contextualises the situation by commenting on the English situation, as outlined earlier, and that accruing in Europe. Across Europe, particularly in Holland, Switzerland and France (where there had been Calvinist Churches since the Reformation) revivals of religion, particularly of an evangelical type, were leading to a repudiation of the 'intrusion of the State into the Church's domain' and creating schisms. He brings secession churches within Scotland into his argument in the sense of a contemporary challenge of the whole notion of establishment, although the Free Church was clearly created on establishment principles. Even prominent civil court members demonstrated an understanding of the need for the separation, Lord Cockburn maintaining it to be 'the most honourable feat for Scotland that its whole history supplies' and Lord Jeffrey asserting a pride in his country, that there was no other 'country upon earth where such a deed could have been done.'<sup>67</sup>

Within his broader religious, religio-political and philosophical arguments, Burleigh, like Walker, notes the Moderates' failure to react to political change and a new political philosophy. However, while affirming that the theology of the two parties was not dissimilar, he maintains that the 'aim, manner and content of their preaching' created different experiences for their hearers. In the narrower context of the Highlands, Burleigh claims that 'earnest religion,' born of a 'long struggle against popery and episcopacy, provided somewhat crudely for its own need apart from the ministers without formally breaking with the national Church until 1843.'<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, Withrington asserts that Henderson, in his centenary commemorative work for the General Assembly, sees less coherence in policy or action than 'had generally been reported,' and a greater level of merely reacting to events, the Disruption being an 'incident in the search after Liberty,' an acknowledgement of long-term trends. Judgements of church

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<sup>67</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. (1960), pp.334-335 and 351-354.

<sup>68</sup> Burleigh, J.H.S. (1960), pp.303, 308 and 328.



historians were too 'kirk-dominated' and inward-looking in relation to the situation of the government, which was suffering contemporaneous anxieties over radicalism following Chartist troubles from 1838 onwards. Indeed, the government considered that unless the state furnished a public opinion to counter a General Assembly voice which may not be echoing the "voice of the church" across the nation, there was a danger of 'clerical tyranny.' Machin's revisionist work of 1972 on church-state relations in the 1830s and 1840s sets problems firmly within a wider political framework, according to Withrington, in contending that the Non-Intrusionists' case was not put over strongly enough to 'challenge the government's view' or provide sufficient weight to counter the strong pressure from Irish politicians at a time of threat to the Union from that quarter.<sup>69</sup>

Drummond and Bulloch (1973), acknowledging the religio-political background to the Disruption, submit that it was inevitable, as any Evangelical success in the General Assembly would have required a ratification from the presbyteries under the Barrier Act, which would not have been forthcoming. Nonetheless, they also lend considerable weight to socio-political arguments. Indeed, their conception of the Church of Scotland as an essential ingredient in local government, affecting the ordinary citizen more than the organs of central government, places such arguments firmly in centre stage – reflecting the growing historiographical interest in microcosmic social structures. Local life and local institutions had traditionally carried more weight in Scotland than central bodies, Presbyterianism in the post-Reformation country assuming a politically social democratic character and influence. In their treatment of the Disruption a number of comments reflect such arguments. Firstly, they quote Lord Cockburn as submitting that the Disruption was 'the work of the people.' Later they contend that the 'Scottish public' during the Ten Years' Conflict was 'absorbed in a political cause.'

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<sup>69</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), pp. 139-140 and 143-144.

Deliberating upon the Reform Act, they emphasise that the Free Church played its part outwith the industrial areas in canalizing the 'resentment' of the unenfranchised 'lower classes' 'against the landed proprietors into the channel of a religious dispute.'<sup>70</sup> This broad-based assertion amplifies and conveys into a further realm the arguments of Hume Brown, Walker and Burleigh. Additionally they claim that the Reform Act embodied a tacit abandonment of the 'Scottish system of local institutions' and an insistence on the controlling nature of 'central representative government.'<sup>71</sup>

The religio-political constructs are not forgotten by Drummond and Bulloch, but woven into the socio-political arguments. Maintaining that the Disruption took place over 'the claims of the people against patronage,' the authors submit that the Patronage Act of 1712 violated the Articles of Union and undermined the establishment. The lack of a Scottish parliament in harmony with the needs of the Scottish people, coupled with the remoteness of Westminster, prevented any sympathetic adjustment to the system of patronage as circumstances changed. However, the nub of the whole issue was its association with the 'unceasing debate of Christendom on the relationship between the believing community and the secular world in which it is set'<sup>72</sup> – a philosophical argument revealing the increasing historiographical involvement with *mentalités*, mental structures associated with life experience. In the end 'the intransigence and impatience of the leaders of the Evangelicals' coupled with the inertia of the government should take much of the immediate blame for the Disruption. Walter Elliott observed that the event was 'more than a quarrel about church government;' it signalled the 'fall of a régime,' a régime of 'democratic intellectualism' which had failed to react swiftly enough to the changing conditions of the time. The failure of the Church to act with a single

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<sup>70</sup> Drummond, Andrew L. and Bulloch, James (1973), pp.250-251, 255-259 and 261.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.261.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp.259-260.



voice, to embrace each other's arguments, had split the Establishment and contemporaneously witnessed a low ebb in 'Scotland's sense of nationhood.'<sup>73</sup>

The work of Drummond and Bulloch (1975) concerning the Church in Victorian Scotland essentially reflects views outlined above. However, there are a few interesting additions. The authors contend that a 'fundamental if unexamined question' lay behind the dispute. That question was the practicability of the traditional Calvinist standpoint that the Christian Church could so influence people that 'the standards of the Gospel became the rule of life for society at large.' The question constituted a thorny problem in the rapidly industrialising 'competitive and dynamic' nineteenth century Scottish society. In this society, which in the Highlands was witnessing 'symptoms of a social order in decay' (from at least the mid-eighteenth century onwards), social responsibility, linked to 'privilege and wealth, was being replaced by 'economic considerations.' The Highlands indeed, they claim, behaved differently at the Disruption, at least in the North and West, from the rest of the country. Only in that region did the church become that of the people, the ordinary working folk.<sup>74</sup> This is a submission requiring further exploration. In the theological sphere, Drummond and Bulloch maintain that 'fundamentally the Free Church stood for the Gospel of forgiveness and redemption' as opposed to the 'moralism of the eighteenth century,' generally equated with the ascendancy of the Moderate Party.<sup>75</sup>

A concentration on religio-political arguments still appears to have existed among certain historians until well through the twentieth century. Gordon MacDermid (1967) maintains that removing patronage and interference by civil courts in the spiritual affairs of Christ's church were central to reactions in the Northwest Highlands, whether folk had been influenced by

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<sup>73</sup> Drummond, Andrew L. and Bulloch, James (1973), pp.256,262 and 264.

<sup>74</sup> Drummond, Andrew L. and Bulloch, James (1975), pp.1-2 and 7.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp.16 and 28.

clergy or laymen.<sup>76</sup> Likewise Clark (1970), as intimated earlier, seems to examine the Moderate Party principally in the light of religious and religio-political characteristics, viewing conflicts, including that surrounding patronage, in the light of the opposing notions of man within or without society, such notions seemingly reflecting Moderate versus Evangelical thinking. Clark in fact concedes that the church requires to be conceived as an inherent part of society. Indeed his agreement with the concept of the General Assembly as a 'forum for national debate' in the absence of a Scottish Parliament, despite the intrusion of 'secular politics' and the 'indifference of government' tending to render it ineffectual as an 'independent Established Church,' displays an awareness of the limitations of treating the Disruption controversy as a purely religio-political issue.<sup>77</sup>

Donaldson in a work published as recently as 1985 concentrates on religio-political arguments. Reflecting the 1960s historiographical development of studying microcosmic social structure, he refers, in similar fashion to Drummond and Bulloch, to the relationship between the local community and its church, acknowledging the 'significance of the church as a contributor to the institutional cohesion of the community' even into the nineteenth century. Problems, however, accrued where 'new communities were poorly served by the existing parishes,' a 'failure to adjust the ecclesiastical system' to changing settlement patterns contributing greatly to the pre-Disruption agitation.<sup>78</sup>

However, the general thrust of Donaldson's arguments centres round disputes concerning the conflicting theories of the 'Two Kingdoms' and the 'One Kingdom.' Starting with the premise that a distinction existed in the pre-Reformation church between clergy and laity, he maintains that after the Reformation and the rejection of the papacy 'Church and nation were

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<sup>76</sup> MacDermid, Gordon E. (1967), pp.300-301.

<sup>77</sup> Clark, Ian D. L. (1970), pp.202-203 and 222.

<sup>78</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1985), pp.225 and 227.



coterminous.' Consequently, being 'identical in composition and personnel' one authority could govern both and such identity affirmed that the 'government was a Christian government.' He attacks Andrew Melville's 'Two Kingdoms' concept as being paradoxical, unhelpful and untenable, because one community cannot have two heads. It was fallacious to claim that Christ as head of the Church was subservient in the state, in the same way that the King as head of the state was, according to Melville, subservient in the Church. Christ was clearly head of both, thus sanctifying 'the state as well as the church.' Hence the 'One Kingdom' theory was feasible, the problem being to determine which of the earthly agencies, under Christ, should direct church affairs. The 'classical presbyterian attitude' of attempting to separate Church and State was illogical. The Melvillian notion of denying the right of parliament to legislate on church affairs effectively attempted to separate two coterminous bodies. This issue, of parliamentary power, formed a central plank in the pre-Disruption conflict, a conflict which, like earlier similar controversy, was basically between 'the people who made decisions in the church and the people who made decisions in the state.' It could not logically be laid at the door of a simple 'church' versus 'state' contention.<sup>79</sup> This philosophical, *mentalités* and sometimes semantic, argument most probably figured large in General Assembly debates during the 'Ten Years' Conflict, the Evangelicals indubitably espousing the Melvillian interpretation, whereas the Moderates and the Middle Party (non-aligned Evangelicals) would have been attempting to come to terms with the 'One Kingdom' theory.

Although, from the late nineteenth century onwards, socio-political and even philosophical arguments have been seen to figure in the debate concerning causes of the Disruption, a new perspective became general currency by the later decades of the twentieth century. The

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<sup>79</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1985), pp.232-237.

emphasis was switched to socio-economic factors and attendant political implications, particularly in relation to the Highland scene, 'history from below' and collective movements or trends forming part of this perspective.

Hunter (1976) is one of the first historians to have addressed the Disruption in the Highlands in this manner. He regards the destructive conflict between the opposing parties in the Established Church as having no influence within the sphere of Highland affairs, the mass of the crofting population being uninterested in such dissension. The religious awakenings or revivals resulting from impassioned evangelical preaching, either by outside missionaries or local lay preachers or ministers, gained a strong foothold due to the 'social and psychological consequences of the collapse of the old order,' the people viewing evangelicalism as a new framework for 'social cohesion' and 'moral reference.'<sup>80</sup> Hunter's argument alludes to the collapse of the clan system and the gradual replacement of clan chief by economically oriented landlord. Maintaining that the Free Church was anti-landlord, he claims that the Disruption in the Highlands was not merely an ecclesiastical dispute, but a class conflict, the Evangelicals carrying the crofting population with them in a seeming 'tidal wave.'<sup>81</sup> The Highland Free Church was a 'profoundly popular institution,' consequential on crofters standing up 'to their landlords for the first time.'<sup>82</sup> Such a viewpoint concurs with that of Drummond and Bulloch, although the explanation for the phenomenon is noticeably absent from their writings.

The anti-landlord argument is reflected in the Reverend R. Macpherson's survey of the parish of Moy and Dalarossie (Inverness-shire). He contends that resentment at indignities, including clearance, foisted upon them by the landlords had been suppressed but surfaced in the issue of patronage, causing Highlanders therefore to 'secede from the established church in large

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<sup>80</sup> Hunter, James (1995), pp.96 and 103.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp.104 and 96.

<sup>82</sup> Hunter, James (1974), p.358.



numbers.’<sup>83</sup> Richards also adopts this notion of protest, asserting that the Disruption, ‘a saga of protest,’ displayed a ‘measure of solidarity’ among the people. Religion provided a forum for the general population to express its sense of alienation from ‘secular masters’ and assert its own will.<sup>84</sup>

Callum Brown, starting from the premise that society and the economy have the power to shape religion,<sup>85</sup> also regards the collapse of the old order as having thrust a ‘wedge between lairds and people,’ evangelicalism furnishing the answer to their sense of disorientation. Evangelicalism became ‘increasingly associated with discontent and hostility to landowners,’ evangelical clergy being attracted to the new government-sponsored General Assembly churches in crofting areas. The intensity of Free Church adherence among the ‘lower ranks in Highland society’ was ‘unmatched elsewhere in Scotland,’ early obstruction by landowners regarding sites for churches ‘imprinting the Disruption in crofter mythology as a great social as well as ecclesiastical revolution.’<sup>86</sup> Brown’s firmly social approach reflects the pre-eminence he gives to the theory that society and the economy have the power to shape religion.<sup>87</sup>

Charles Withers (1988), examining Gaelic Scotland, also espouses the view that the social situation in the Highlands was a crucial factor in determining responses to the Disruption. Believing that social transformation affected responses to evangelical revivals and the formation of the Free Church, he considers ‘religious sentiment’ was employed to ‘confront social antagonisms.’ The spiritual power of the mass revival meetings, associated with values from established religious beliefs and interpretations, furnished an ‘alternative hegemony,

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<sup>83</sup> Macpherson, Reverend R. (1971-72), p.257.

<sup>84</sup> Richards E. (1985), pp.337 and 359.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, Callum (1993), p.7.

<sup>86</sup> Brown, Callum (1987), pp.119, 123 and 125-127.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, Callum (1993), p.7.

functioning through maintained beliefs in opposition to the social changes and attitudes of the time.' He concludes by affirming, like Hunter, that the Disruption in the Highlands was 'more a class conflict than an ecclesiastical dispute.'<sup>88</sup>

The popularity of socio-economic explanations for the intensity of reaction to the Disruption in the Highlands is revealed in the writings of several other historians, either as the principal causal agent or as a notable contributory factor. Smout, in his social history, maintains that the pre-Disruption evangelical movement was fuelled by the 'catastrophic break-up of the material norms of Highland life,' the people seeking refuge from this bewildering social situation in the 'compensations of an intense spiritual enthusiasm.'<sup>89</sup> James Lachlan Macleod sees the Highlanders assuming a more vigorous and active role in their pursuit of the evangelical path, religion being not only of central significance in their lives but also the only area where they felt able to control their own destiny in a changing socio-economic world.<sup>90</sup> A prime activity impacting on the lives and well-being of ordinary folk in this changing world was the Clearances, the clearing of tenants off the land for the landlord's economic benefit. Blamires, studying the Clearances, contends that the Established Church represented the landlords, the people consequently turning to the Free Church, an institution which 'would recognise their own unique way of life.'<sup>91</sup>

Cheyne (1999) admits that a sociological approach to the Disruption has been favoured by recent historians while the religious aspects have been downplayed.<sup>92</sup> Historians who have seen sociological arguments as part of a package of causal constructs include the Reverend MacAlpine, writing about Ross and Cromarty, who mentions specifically a 'suppressed

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<sup>88</sup> Withers, Charles W.J. (1988), pp.338, 340 and 342.

<sup>89</sup> Smout, T. C. (1985), p.436.

<sup>90</sup> Macleod, James Lachlan (1993), p.246.

<sup>91</sup> Blamires, Steve (1996), p.5.

<sup>92</sup> Cheyne, A. C. (1999), p.116.



resentment over the Clearances.’<sup>93</sup> This facet had also been identified by Macpherson, as noted earlier. Hostility of landlords to the Free Church is one of the issues embraced by Donald Smith, in company with such historians as Hunter, Withers and Callum Brown.<sup>94</sup>

Tom Devine enters the debate by adopting what is essentially a two-pronged attack on the question. The spiritual angle to his argument will be analysed later, but his socio-economic propositions may be appropriately addressed at this stage. Devine sees the lay preachers, ‘The Men,’ as having been a highly ‘significant indigenous force’ in the spread of evangelicalism. They acted as a social elite and successors to the disappearing class of clan society tacksmen, their ‘eventual social influence’ serving to sweep large numbers of the common folk into the Free Church. Although admitting the difficulty of tracing ‘direct linkages between revivalism and clearance, famine and privation,’ Devine, like Hunter, considers that ‘structural changes’ in society could well have provided a ‘cultural context’ for the religious fervour stimulated by missionary endeavour.<sup>95</sup> The message of spiritual comfort embedded in evangelicalism may well have helped to assuage the psychological impact on Highlanders of such devastating events as clearance, economic crisis and the rapid disintegration of their ‘old world.’

Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of fresh theories, notably cultural and political, but also philosophical and geographical. Tending to embrace ‘history from below’ and recognising the importance of *mentalités*, their often interdisciplinary approach has mainly been one of a cluster of constructs. Allan MacInnes, like Devine, acknowledges the spiritual component but throws greater doubt on the class division and conflict theses than either Hunter or Devine, asserting for example that the ‘Evangelical party in the Highlands was neither universally popular nor populist despite its averred opposition to the exercise of

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<sup>93</sup> MacAlpine, The Reverend A. (1984), p.155.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, Donald C. (1987), pp.140-141.

<sup>95</sup> Devine, T. M. (1994), pp.103-104 and 106.

patronage by the leading landlord in every parish.' He identifies three 'complementary cultural influences' in the development of an energetic Highland evangelicalism, namely spiritual poetry, the 'native powers of imagination and language' of the lay elite (*na daoine* – the men) and the spread of schools established by the Gaelic School Societies.<sup>96</sup> Mearns also recognises the value of employing the native tongue, Gaelic, in missionary activity and the spread of evangelical religion,<sup>97</sup> and Paton acknowledges the existence of cultural and ideological transformation aided and abetted by the 'crowd psychology' of Highland religion and the 'high emotionalism' of the Highland character.<sup>98</sup> Paton also touches on spiritual and socio-economic factors, the latter being embodied in an observation that the evangelical gatherings constituted assemblies of survivors from the old clan communities and a statement that the Disruption constituted a triumph over contemporary lairds. All these facets undoubtedly played their part in weaving the web of causal factors of the Disruption.

Political influences have been registered by MacAlpine, Smith and Mearns, tending to echo the socio-political constructs of earlier writers such as Walker and Burleigh. MacAlpine claims that the church had been affected by the Reform Act of 1832, extending parliamentary electoral franchise.<sup>99</sup> Smith, on the other hand, considers the French Revolution had created fear of anarchy among the churches, even democracy being suspect in that it 'suggested not only mob rule and social disorder, but the destruction of religion and morality.' This political attitude, likewise prevalent in government circles, served to hinder the efforts of the non-intrusion party to overthrow patronage, thus being a precipitating cause of the Disruption.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> MacInnes, Allan I. (1990), pp.49, 51-52 and 55-56.

<sup>97</sup> Mearns, Alexander (1992), p.57.

<sup>98</sup> Paton, David (2001), pp. 97, 133-135 and 131.

<sup>99</sup> MacAlpine, the Reverend A. (1984), p.155.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, Donald (1987), pp.75-76 and 81-82.



Mearns also debates this determinant, commenting that Moderate adherence to this viewpoint has been claimed to have contributed to Evangelical strength in the Highlands.<sup>101</sup>

Firmly embedded in the political arena is the concept of national identity, a subject of major debate among historians. Cheyne, for example, considers the Disruption weakened, and maybe even destroyed, the 'role of the national church as an accepted and protected symbol and agent of Scottish National identity.' Callum Brown, on the other hand, questions the enormous weight given to the Church of Scotland's role in 'securing Scottish identity' in the period prior to the Disruption.<sup>102</sup>

The geographical argument, propounded by Callum Brown, is merely a claim of association rather than a causal component. He maintains that a strong correlation exists between landscape and intensity, type and doctrinal content of religion. Isolated regions are more likely to evince a firmness of faith accompanied by a strict observance of holy days, dissent and schism being a more probable consequence of failures by 'official' churches to uphold such standards.<sup>103</sup>

The last twenty years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in examining religio-political and spiritual aspects of reaction to the Disruption. However, in contrast to earlier writings, which saw these as the principal or sole determinants, these factors have tended generally to become regarded as forming one element, of varying significance, among a number of theoretical constructs – a reflection of Burke's 'new' history. Nonetheless, some academics place considerable emphasis on arguments directly associated with religion.

Donaldson, while admitting that the 'democratic political tendency of the time' undoubtedly created an atmosphere for secession, contends that politics had not been the original concern

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<sup>101</sup> Mearns, Alexander (1992), p.57.

<sup>102</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), pp.147 and 151.

<sup>103</sup> Brown, Callum (2000), e-mail.

of the secessionists. Finding that conservatives in Church courts frustrated their 'aims to spread the gospel at home and abroad,' they 'were driven to attack its constitutional position.' Taking the broad canvas of Scotland as a whole it appears that Thomas Chalmers, leading the 'rebellion', concentrated on the issue of faith, experiencing considerable antipathy towards secular agitation and class conflict.<sup>104</sup> Meek, examining the impact of revivals, which were aided in areas like Skye by such influences as local evangelicalism and Gaelic Schools Society teachers, identifies "families of faith." Floating the hypothesis that revivals could have encouraged greater social stability during socio-economic crises, these groupings of families and their 'collaterals' would have arisen from the additional bonding which spiritual experience created within communities already linked by kin and culture. Additionally the Disruption could have brought the Highlands a certain level of religious stability in the sense of institutionalising a 'highly demotic form of evangelicalism' which, as a populist movement, had been centring its activities on foci outwith 'formal Presbyterianism.'<sup>105</sup> The validity of such concepts merits deeper consideration.

Stewart Brown has addressed the religio-political field of the interaction between the events leading up to the Disruption and the essential features of the Union. Claiming that the Disruption constituted an occasion for the mass of the people to challenge the 'authority set over them' he maintains that the absence of firm 'political or nationalist lines' caused the Disruption to lack significant secular effect. However, in the socio-economic arena it witnessed the end of church domination and politically it altered the 'constitutional relations of the two countries' by altering the Union. Brown accepts the 'Two Kingdoms' theory of church and state as being an inherent part of the pre-Disruption conflict, without criticising it in the fashion of Donaldson, and acknowledges the necessity in Scotland for delineating and

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<sup>104</sup> Donaldson, Gordon (1990), pp.129-130.

<sup>105</sup> Meek, Donald (1998a), pp.120-126, 137 and 139.



co-ordinating the two. The different concepts of government between England, more absolutist, and Scotland, with its 'presbyterian polity,' aggravated and complicated the situation. The Claim of Right in effect denied the 'doctrine of absolute parliamentary sovereignty,' while the Moderates, although accepting the 'two kingdoms,' asserted that disputes between the kingdoms could only be resolved in the civil courts.

Brown continues by excusing governmental wavering as being an expression of anxiety that religious rebels could ally with political insurgents. Compromises, as noted before, failed to work, and Scottish judges embraced the notion of absolutist Parliamentary sovereignty, operating within a British context rather than native tradition. Consequently, the Disruption was inevitable in that the Evangelicals in order to retain the tradition of independence and wholeness, *nec tamen consumebatur*, and attempt to operate within a federal structure had to secede, giving a hollow victory for the unitary state. If Scots had been able to make their own decisions within a purely Scottish context, the Disruption could have been avoided.<sup>106</sup> The inevitability or possibility of avoidance of the Disruption has been argued over by other historians and forms an interesting academic debate.

Withrington, like Brown, adopting a somewhat metanarrative approach in his study of the developments leading up to the Veto Act, which he asserts was the 'vital opening shot in the "ten years' conflict," recognises a gradual evolution in the debate over patronage. At the start of the nineteenth century it was believed the stability of the church relied on maintaining popular support at a time when a 'threat of radicalism, if not republicanism' towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars created anxiety within governmental and institutional circles. Even the Evangelical leader, the Reverend Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, claimed that 'hopeless demands to abolish patronage' could overturn improvements in patron's nominations.

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<sup>106</sup> Brown, Stewart J. (1993), pp.31-.41.

Questioning the validity of regarding the Veto Act as a victory for popular rights, as asserted by the Free Church historian Robert Buchanan in 1849, Withrington explores the history of the move to restore the 'call' by the people, as retained in the unrepealed section of the 1690 Act. Quandaries arose among Evangelicals about the notion of the unscriptural nature of patronage versus the pragmatic necessity of retaining state support for such matters as church extension or repairs and education provision. Coupled with Voluntary taunts about Erastianism and state-church connections plus governmental inertia, it became apparent that patronage would need to be subjected to reform by the church. Thus the Veto Act, initiating the major conflict which was only resolved, temporarily, by the Disruption, 'took the form it did' at that particular juncture.<sup>107</sup>

Having recognised that these last few quoted historians have deliberately confined their arguments to a narrow field, it is now apposite to turn to historians whose writings have been based on a broader agenda. The 'deepening divide' between the two parties in the General Assembly and the continual frustration at civil courts overturning acts passed by this body are seen by MacAlpine as contributory causes to the 1843 Disruption.<sup>108</sup> Smith, narrowing his political arguments to a consideration of the 'body politic' of the church itself, claims that non-intrusionists believed that the Church would gain new vitality when released from the 'bondage of patronage,' enabling its work 'among the masses' to be conducted to greater effect.<sup>109</sup>

Callum Brown (1998) widens his approach from earlier mainly sociological constructs to accommodate arguments propounded by other historians regarding the divisions within the Church. Similarly identifying patronage as the 'key issue,' he regards it as the 'defining event

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<sup>107</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1998), pp.101, 104, 106, 122 and 126.

<sup>108</sup> MacAlpine, The Reverend A. (1984), p.155.

<sup>109</sup> Smith, Donald (1987), p.82.



in Scottish local history between 1714 and 1850.’<sup>110</sup> Regionalising the appeal of evangelicalism (and in consequence the subsequent impact of the Disruption), in the manner of such historians as Lynch or Drummond and Bulloch, he submits that the cities and the ‘emergent crofting communities of the Highlands and Hebrides’ were most affected.<sup>111</sup>

Brown alludes to several arguments exercising the minds of historians, including both the earlier mentioned debate concerning the significance of both the Disruption and its precipitating conflict for Scottish national identity and also the undermining of the notion of the ‘ideal of the democratic intellect preserved in parish schools, kirk sessions and presbyteries.’ However, he urges caution on both scores, submitting that there is a lack of ‘substantive contemporary evidence.’ He likewise raises the question of relating class identity, consciousness and struggle to reactions to the Disruption, noting that Ansdell has recently questioned this in his study of the Isle of Lewis.<sup>112</sup> MacLaren in Aberdeen and Hillis in Glasgow have also addressed the class agenda and, in a wider framework, Hillis has ‘demonstrated that the sociology of the Disruption was very varied across Scotland.’ However, the Disruption, a short-term disaster for the Established Church,<sup>113</sup> continues to be painted on a broad canvas, whether regional or national.

Withrington, in referring to a work published by Callum Brown in 1993, relates the latter’s suggestion that the Disruption should be ‘looked at in the wide context of the renowned “schismatic tendencies” of Scottish presbyterianism.’ Reasons propounded by religious sociologists to account for this include ‘indifference to or an alienation from existing churches’ or a sign of a ‘growing popular enthusiasm for religion.’<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Brown, Callum (1998), pp.70 and 72.

<sup>111</sup> Brown, Callum (1998), p.75.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp.76-77.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp.77-79.

<sup>114</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), pp.149-150, quoting Brown, Callum (1993).

Recent historians who have addressed the spiritual element in their package of causal factors include Devine, Paton and Macinnes. Devine pinpoints an essential difference between Evangelicals and Moderates. Evangelical faith being more personal and emotional than that of the Moderates, who regarded 'civilisation' as a necessary pre-requisite for accepting the Christian gospel, it was the former who espoused missionary effort as a necessary vehicle for conversion. Missions, initially exogenous but rapidly becoming indigenous, spiritual poetry (part of the broader cultural scene) and the leadership of *Na Daoine* all constituted vital elements in the successful spread of evangelicalism and the consequent readiness of large numbers of ordinary folk to favour the Free Church in 1843.<sup>115</sup> Although recognising socio-economic elements in Responses to the Disruption in the Highlands, as outlined above, Devine affirms that the 'triumphant Free Church' embraced an evangelical theology of 'personal spiritual growth' rather than 'social justice.'<sup>116</sup>

Paton, embracing the later twentieth century historiographical trend of investigating microcosmic social structures, rituals and beliefs, maintains that the large religious gatherings, successors to the former clan gatherings, were successful forums for conversion, evangelical Presbyterianism being essentially fuelled by traditional religious attitudes.<sup>117</sup> Macinnes likewise contends that evangelicalism was 'an integral part of the reformed tradition which remained resistant to rationalist and scientific reappraisals of doctrine during the nineteenth century.' Evangelical Protestantism offered crofting communities a 'sense of dignity.' Emphasising that physical and material trials in this world could be endured in the 'hope of spiritual reward in the next,' it was essentially non-materialist, focusing on 'spiritual

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<sup>115</sup> Devine, T. M. (1994), pp.102-105.

<sup>116</sup> Devine, T. M. (1994), p.107.

<sup>117</sup> Paton, David (2001), pp.135-136.



awakening and individual conversion,' a faith in which ordinary folk could find succour in a bewildering and demoralising environment for which they could find no other answers.<sup>118</sup>

Even more local, microcosmic reaction has been explored to a certain extent in the works alluded to by Callum Brown (1998). These will now be examined briefly in an attempt to discern clues about more specific reasons for reaction to the Disruption.

MacLaren (1974), before commencing his investigation into the social class structure of Free Church adherence in Aberdeen, identifies religious and religio-political causes for the Disruption. He submits that the debate on patronage 'institutionalised' the 'struggle between the moderate and evangelical parties' but that the issue was the deeper one of 'two incompatible philosophies of life.' The former exuded tolerance and permissiveness and preached 'morality,' whereas the latter were more puritanical, showed fervent 'enthusiasm' and emphasised predestination and hell fire, being hard-line Calvinists. Although MacLaren acknowledges the problems created by 'rapid industrialisation, population growth and migration' in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century he conceptualises the pre-Disruption dispute as a battle between the State and the Evangelical majority, who were pressing their non-intrusion campaign.

Still painting on a broad canvas, MacLaren maintains that ministerial support for the Free Church came from 'two distinct socially and geographically diverse sources.' Geographically, support was high in the northern synods of Ross and Sutherland and Caithness, but low in the southern synods of Merse and Teviotdale, Galloway and Dumfries. Although acknowledging the need for 'more detailed research' he is ready to blame landlord clearances for high support in the north, claiming that an 'economically depressed and often illiterate peasantry' could

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<sup>118</sup> Macinnes, Allan I. (1990), pp.43 and 60.

thus express 'spiritual and moral superiority without fear of eviction or legal retribution.'<sup>119</sup>

This may not have been the case right across the board, a point which this study endeavours to explore. The cities, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, likewise demonstrated a high level of support, city ministers representing a 'class not only prosperous enough to provide their stipends but also by their financial contributions to support the greater part of the highland clergy.'

Within Aberdeen, his specific area of enquiry, MacLaren identifies a unanimous secession of the fifteen ministers, mature men from a 'middle class' background of 'ministers, farmers, merchants, schoolteachers.' They saw themselves as representing the official Church of Scotland, unable to remain in an 'Erastian Establishment' and urged on both by 'activist members of their congregations' and by 'taunts in the local press.' 'Congregational secession' was affected by that of the minister and elders, being greatest in the *quoad sacra* churches, which were 'outwith the patronage of the town council, the class profile tending to be that of the more financially comfortable. In the *quoad civilia* churches the departure of the elders was more significant than that of the ministers, the elders being influential men, not just part of an organ of religious and social control. Seceding elders across the board tended to be 'young shoots' rather than 'dry leaves,' but nonetheless of sufficient financial standing and often rising social status. Support for the Establishment generally came from long-established middle-class families, whereas upwardly mobile business families moving into new residential areas peopled the Free Church. Working-class adherence to the Free Church was problematic due to the 'middle-class nature of the new church and its inquisitorial financial organisation' coupled with a contemporaneous serious local 'economic recession.'<sup>120</sup> Such findings are

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<sup>119</sup> MacLaren, A. Allan (1974), pp.27-30.

<sup>120</sup> MacLaren, A. Allan (1974), pp.30, 54-59, 61-62, 64, 93-94 and 210.



suggestive of the Free Church having a different social composition in a city environment from that hinted at in the Highlands.

However, the findings of Hillis (1981) in a representative selection of churches in Glasgow would tend to conflict slightly with those of MacLaren. Although the official Church of Scotland did have a higher percentage of working-class members, the highest proportion of members in the non-established churches still came from the unskilled classes. However, like MacLaren, Hillis stresses that this class struggled under the 'heavy financial obligations of membership,' although his other concern is that the labouring classes found the stress of 'living within strict moral guidelines' somewhat disconcerting.<sup>121</sup> Membership of the lower middle-classes in the non-established churches is seen to outnumber that of people in the higher middle-class bracket. The opposite appertained in the Church of Scotland. This is reflected in the composition of the eldership, the higher proportion of elders in the Established Church coming from higher and more long-standing middle-class backgrounds. However, although there is scant representation of the working-class on any kirk session, nevertheless this class constituted the highest proportion of members in all churches<sup>122</sup> – a situation which MacLaren implied did not accrue in Aberdeen Free Churches.

Although these last two quoted historians, particularly MacLaren, have carefully investigated the social composition of the ministers, elders and congregations within their respective areas of study, nevertheless attempts to explain adherence have been from an explicitly socio-economic angle, other issues such as spiritual forces or church commitment not having been addressed. Additionally comparisons are made within a specific type of geographical environment. Although helpful in increasing an understanding of some of the local issues at work in determining reaction to the Disruption, they have inherent limitations of scope.

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<sup>121</sup> Hillis, P. (1981), pp.77-78.

<sup>122</sup> Hillis, P. (1981), pp.76-78.

Ansdehl, whose work on Lewis belongs to the early 1990s, has attempted to address various theoretical perspectives, questioning their validity in relation to the situation which his researches would suggest appertained on that island, again a limited geographical environment. He contends that in the past historians have paid too little attention to forces operating at grass-roots level and that attitudes to Highland Christianity have tended to 'betray a deplorable ignorance and a poorly concealed hostility.'

Referring, on the other hand, to 'glowing accounts of Lewis church history' penned by Free Church historians as being similarly questionable, he addresses the debate largely introduced by Hunter concerning the class conflict theory as the causal factor behind the Disruption in the Gaidhealtachd. Evidence for this is lacking in Lewis, the proprietors offering substantial support for the Free Church and adherence to the new denomination being widespread and incorporating all classes. Indeed, to exemplify, the social composition of elders in the Free and Established Churches in Stornoway reveals a distinct similarity of background, both including such men as merchants and members of the professions.

Ansdehl proposes a number of contributory factors in the overwhelming level of Free Church support in Lewis. Firstly, the disruption in the national church apparently overtook the spread of Evangelicalism in the island, which, being supported by the proprietors and displaying harmony between them and the minister and people, would not have created an inevitable secession. However, the spirit of the movement and its need for undivided commitment was in tune with the doctrines of 'spiritual independence and the headship of Christ over the church' and thus Lewis became 'inextricably caught up in a larger debate.'

Evangelical success is ascribed to poor church coverage, an ignorance of the Christian message, leaving the islanders bound up in a mixture of pagan, superstitious and inter-denominational concepts, and a morality barely affected by the contemporary Church of



Scotland message. Missionary preachers, catechists (having regular access to all family homes), teachers and later elders and appointed ministers of an evangelical persuasion all helped to spread this fervent religious movement. Additionally, support was whipped up at meetings held during the Ten Years' Conflict.

Ansdell emphasises the lack of evidence supporting the anti-landlord theory in Lewis – quite the contrary, the proprietors eagerly offered sites for the Free Church. Likewise, the theory that the psychologically damaging and disorienting effects of the 'collapse of the old kin-based order' were responsible for the success of Evangelicalism as furnishing something concrete to embrace seems inapplicable. Island society basically centred on small townships rather than on a notion of kinship linking tenants with the clan chief. The economic situation was apparently sound and the townships 'would have provided continuity and security.' Evangelicalism in Lewis brought education, literacy and a 'compelling certainty' to a society lacking 'both a firm religious notion' to counteract it or a 'central authority from which an alternative community could derive direction and consolidate resistance.' The new dominant social group, dominant 'by virtue of moral and intellectual leadership,' changed the social structure, ensuring grass-roots support through the threat of stigma, alienation and ostracism for dissenters – a not inconsiderable factor in a society of small, tightly-knit communities.<sup>123</sup>

Ansdell has questioned the validity of applying certain theoretical constructs, both religio-political and socio-economic, to a local situation. He has demonstrated that specific and undeniably localised factors had a considerable role to play in determining reaction to the Disruption. Hillis, in a more broad-sweeping study (1993), admits that the sociology of the Disruption varied 'according to region and according to the different social groups within each region.' Acknowledging more localised precipitators, such as ministerial personality and local

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<sup>123</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1992), pp.181-189, 191-193 and 195-197.

traditions, he recognises that his essay is 'largely a preliminary study of a large and complex subject,' hopefully encouraging others to investigate the situation in specific localities.

Hillis investigates certain arguments, such as the socio-economic theory of the adverse effects of the Highland Clearances on the population, with parish ministers purportedly failing to condemn the landlords. Highlighting its over-generalisation, he notes that certain accused ministers, such as the incumbents at Farr and Durness, took most of their congregations with them when translating to the Free Church in 1843. Local loyalties, traditions and patronage issues require inclusion in the equation. However, he gives nodding approval to the association of landlord policies with Church of Scotland unpopularity in the Highlands, while admitting that 'the Clearances were only one of many factors accounting for the Disruption.' Identifying one very specific factor and setting it in the context of the urban Lowlands, he acknowledges that the personality of the minister could 'override social determinism' in the cities.<sup>124</sup>

Hillis's essay focuses on the socio-economic dimension and has some limitations. Although he concludes by repeating the necessity for more local studies in order that comparative analysis of these may serve to clarify the wider picture,<sup>125</sup> it is the wider picture of the sociology of the Disruption to which he refers.

Ansdell's recent volume (1998) on religion in the Highlands has stimulated a realisation of the value of comparative local studies responding to a wider field of enquiry. His work was the catalyst helping to formulate the approach adopted in this study. Examining the viewpoints of other historians, Ansdell admits that the different theoretical constructs all contain elements of validity. Although tending to emphasise the centrality of the religio-political and spiritual explanations, he recognises the importance of placing these in a cultural context, cultural in

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<sup>124</sup> Hillis, P. L. M. (1993), pp.44-45, 47-48, 50, 55 and 58.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.58.



this sense embracing all aspects of the daily life of an individual or community. Acknowledging the distinctiveness and widespread commitment associated with the Disruption in the Highlands, as intimated in the first part of this chapter, he affirms that it was appropriate to the religious aspirations of the people. Spiritual independence and the headship of Christ over the church were themes holding a strong appeal for them, being 'consistent with the undivided commitment which evangelicalism required.' Nonetheless, within this theme of religious change he is anxious to demonstrate the essential link with the cultural environment, although he maintains that motivators for change are open to debate. Associated with this linkage is the admission that, although support for the Free Church was substantial throughout the Highlands (and greater than that of the clergy), notable differentials existed.<sup>126</sup>

Addressing the argument of Callum Brown, alluded to earlier, that primacy should be given "to the power of society (and the economy) to shape religion" Ansdell interprets this claim to imply that 'change in the social and economic structure of society is the preferred frame of reference for explaining religious change.' Adopting the same strategy then 'a belief group can also function as a socially significant group' and thus be an 'adequate frame of reference for explaining religious change.' However, most significantly, a 'range of correlations' could exist, linking those expressing a 'particular religious preference' and it would be unwise to assume that the same pattern could be 'applied to every parish in the Highlands and Islands.'<sup>127</sup> Whether explanatory factors are sought within or without the institution of the church, they should merely be regarded as useful tools which cannot be applied in blanket fashion to the whole region.

As Ansdell affirms, the Disruption forms a 'complex area of historical enquiry in which a variety of factors are involved,' thus creating a 'need for local studies to provide an

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<sup>126</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998a), pp.62-65 and 71-72.

<sup>127</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998b), pp.92-93.

explanation for events,' although there is the caveat that 'even in this context there remains a further tension between individuals and groups.' Nevertheless 'this tension is not insurmountable' as generally a number of reasons inform a decision and, although a plethora of personal issues may be inaccessible to the historian, 'historical enquiry will often provide explanations that individuals could subscribe to while at the same time retaining more personal reasons.'<sup>128</sup>

Ansdell has thus indicated, in recognising the value of different discourses in historiography, issues which could usefully be investigated in relation to the Disruption in the Highlands. Firstly, he has questioned the applicability of specific theoretical constructs within each community, without recourse to local factors which may have informed reaction to the Disruption. Secondly, he has queried the relative importance of these arguments in different areas and finally he has highlighted the fact that Free Church adherence, although indubitably strong across the region, did in fact vary from parish to parish, a point hinted at within the framework of the local studies from different Scottish regions quoted above. As documents such as correspondence of the time can demonstrate the society of the period was still a series of intimate localities, although inevitably the balance between nation, regions and local communities was experiencing a continuum of change.

Withrington also, in acknowledging that in some respects the "real" history of the Disruption is still being sought and that each age approaches the subject with different sets of questions and expected answers relating to contemporary concerns, puts forward the possible hypothesis that 'fiercely-researched local studies' may now be 'the best way forward.'<sup>129</sup> As Withrington observes, such studies have already begun to make a positive contribution to an understanding of reactions to this momentous event, but have tended to be examined in isolation, whereas

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p.93.

<sup>129</sup> Withrington, Donald J. (1995), p.152.



this study accepts the value of comparison and contextualisation. Having undertaken an inevitably restricted overview of the historiography of the Disruption in order to broadly contextualise the thesis, the next chapter will address the rationale behind the study and furnish a brief background to the three parishes selected.

## **CHAPTER 2. THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY.**

This study has been undertaken in answer to the recognition by both Ansdell and Withrington, noted at the end of the last chapter, that there is both a need for and a value in pursuing local studies in the search for explanations for reaction to the Disruption. A case study approach has been assumed, but on a comparative rather than an isolated basis, in order to discover how three particular Highland communities actually responded to the Disruption and why. In adopting this approach a detailed picture of each community has been sought in an attempt to discern the dynamics of life within each one, the interplay of different influences and forces which served to shape their response to the event. In its aim to discover why reactions differed, this exploration of the multiplicity and complexity of possible factors operating at community level to elicit a specific response should likewise point to the varying applicability of broad generalisations in local contexts.

Both primary and secondary sources have been tapped in an effort to obtain as full a picture as possible. Primary sources investigated include the Statistical Accounts of Scotland, Census Returns, commissioned investigative reports, newspaper annals, local town and parish records, estate papers, kirk session and presbytery minutes, educational records, procurator fiscal papers, travellers' reports and private letters. The often serendipitous nature of material recovered has to be acknowledged as well as the problems created by incomplete data, such as the curious absence of Kirk Session records for Tain in the immediate pre-Disruption years. Much local information has come from the 'traces' embedded in primary documents, although writers concentrating on the localities concerned have also proved invaluable. Secondary material, covering all perspectives on a more general as well as a local level, has been drawn



principally from published books, including historical, religious and folklore texts, published or unpublished theses, journal articles and Gaelic religious poetry.

The methodology employed in communicating the findings of this study was influenced by an exploration of trends in historiography, a cursory allusion to which preceded the investigation into the historiography of the Disruption. As its main thrust is an exploration of the background of three Highland parishes and a search for possible factors contributing to their responses to religious movements and ultimately a religious event, Hufton's observation is particularly pertinent. Historians, 'who are usually children of their times in the questions they set themselves, will doubtless continue the process of dissolving the old boundaries of historical enquiry so as to integrate religion as a category of analysis.'<sup>130</sup> This assertion furnishes a rationale for giving equal emphasis to the various elements of religion at local level, including religious movements, observance and personnel (incorporating the roles, personalities, connections and impact of the latter), as well as to the wider cultural context of the communities and to the broader ecclesiastical developments occurring at national level.

As the study will demonstrate detailed data of individual responses and happenings in the communities during the days and weeks leading up to the Disruption does not exist. It is possible to trace certain movements and events occurring during the previous months from such sources as Presbytery Minutes or personal correspondence, but there are serious limitations as regards details of group or family responses and the specific cannot be deduced from the general. Parliamentary records, for example, do not give intimate particulars about individuals within communities and Commissions interviewed selected people, thus being notably partial. Although, therefore, having wrung the data dry, it has not been possible to give a 'blow by blow' account of many immediate pre-Disruption happenings in the

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<sup>130</sup> Hufton, Olwen (2002), p.77.

communities, nevertheless the background of significant individuals, movements and life experiences for the inhabitants has enabled a complex picture to be drawn of diverse forces and influences.

The range of materials utilised in this investigation has been outlined above, and the intricate processes involved in handling and interpreting these sources has produced a picture, which if painted by another researcher might have assumed an altogether different appearance. Reflecting the approach taken, it is expressly hoped that this further chapter in the historiography of the Disruption will serve to stimulate further debate.

### **Selection of the Communities**

Three communities were chosen for this study, having been identified as displaying differing responses to the Disruption. The parish was selected as the geographical dimension, since the relationship to a particular church and minister can be readily determined and such a decision obviates any arbitrariness in setting community boundaries.

The first community chosen, Tain in Easter Ross, in the north-east of mainland Scotland, constitutes a parish in which the minister, elders and virtually the whole congregation 'came out' in the Disruption. The second community, the parish of Strath in the southern half of the Isle of Skye, an inner Hebridean island just off the north-west coast, witnessed a completely contrasting reaction. The minister, elders and a vast majority of the congregation remained within the fold of the Established Church. The final community to be selected, Portree, in northern Skye, displayed a third type of reaction in that the minister stayed 'in' but lost a majority of his parishioners to the Free Church.

The principal factor in selecting the parishes having been, as stated above, their conflicting responses to the Disruption, it was not necessary to pick communities in three different areas



of the Highlands and Islands. Indeed, this could have placed too great an emphasis on spatial contrasts and varying regional contexts. Similarly, adopting a socio-economic approach and picking parishes displaying differing profiles would have created an imbalance of causal factors. Additionally, in order to select three obviously disparate communities it would have been appropriate to choose a large burgh such as Inverness, supporting more than one 'parish minister,' thus creating complications of boundary definition. Focusing, however, on the interaction between minister and parishioners, a central theme in any community, did not obviate the choice of two parishes contiguous with one another.

Other factors contributed to the choice of the specific parishes. For example, in selecting Tain as a parish solidly adhering to the Free Church the principal factor was its location within an area displaying a comparatively lengthy and strong association with evangelical religion. Personal interest also contributed to the choice of Tain itself, as opposed to another burgh-centred or purely rural parish within Easter Ross, an ancestor, the Reverend Thomas Grant, having become Free Church minister there in 1858. Although it was recognised that there would be socio-economic and linguistic differentials with the Skye parishes, details only emerged during the course of research and the effects of these will be discussed in the appropriate chapters.

A secondary factor in selecting the two Skye parishes was the fascinating fact that two adjoining communities, seemingly similar in profile, displayed contrasting responses to the Disruption. Although such a situation may well have occurred elsewhere in the Highlands the proximity of these parishes to the college base facilitated research.

In order to operate from an empirical standpoint it was necessary to develop profiles of the three communities. This involved a search for sources revealing information about the socio-economic structure of the parish, including population size and structure, the occupational

scene and the domestic material environment. Evidence about specific cultural elements was also sought, in particular education, language, literature, customs and social activities, beliefs and also perceived personality characteristics. Data concerning the religious framework of the communities included material relating to history, geographical and physical settings for worship, the existence of other denominations, the role of church courts, ministers and lay figures such as catechists, missionaries, teachers and “The Men,” spirituality, revivals and ministerial kinship networks.

The profiles developed from the available resources helped develop an understanding of the unique nature and problems of each parish and enabled possible explanations for their behaviour at the time of the Disruption to be detected. This also facilitated the creation of some useful hypotheses as to why overarching theoretical constructs cannot address all the complexities of individual cases.

### **Setting for the Disruption in the Three Parishes.**

Before moving on to the thematic chapters, it is apposite to furnish a cursory outline of the three parishes in order to set the scene. To help to create an understanding of happenings closer to the Disruption, this will include reference to earlier movements, attitudes and events, embracing any recent patronage disputes, as well as an indication of the ecclesiastical government of the parishes.

#### **Tain.**

Situated in a coastal area, this parish comprised a relatively prosperous small burgh, a surrounding agricultural area and Inver, a tiny fishing village. Topographically it was low-lying with few inherent geographical difficulties of communication between its constituent parts. Although lacking a harbour, access to the parish by public roads in all directions was



good by contemporary standards. The burgh, a Royal Burgh, was an administrative and commercial centre, in the latter case principally displaying an interdependence with its rural hinterland. This agricultural area witnessed distinct improvements in the first half of the nineteenth century. This fact, coupled in the burgh with much new building, constantly developing services such as lighting, water and postal deliveries, an increasingly sophisticated range of educational facilities and a growing use of English rather than Gaelic, are all indicative of a community in transition. The effects of change in two of the three quite different component parts of the parish will be explored in the relevant thematic chapters.

As regards secular governance, unlike the Skye parishes where power, in each case, was vested in two distinct landowners, in Tain there were several landowners as well as a merchant class in the burgh. Additionally, completely altering the balance of power, there was an elected Town Council in the burgh, headed by an elected Provost. The Council, fifteen-strong, comprised landowners and townsmen, the former being interested in the possibility of assuming responsibility for returning members of parliament or representing the burgh at meetings of the Convention of Royal Burghs.<sup>131</sup>

The Town Council had a wide remit, as the Council Book of Tain reveals. This included responsibility for supporting transport in general and carriage of mail within and without the parish, providing the services of drainage, sewerage, water supply and disposal of refuse, providing grants to private educational establishments and discussing medical provision for the poor. It also concerned itself with ecclesiastical matters, such as electing a representative to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland or allocating the division of seats in the new church, opened in 1815.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), p.65.

<sup>132</sup> Council Book of Tain, B 70/6/2, B 70/6/3, B 70/6/4.

Until 1843, when Dingwall was declared to be the county town of Ross, the majority of head courts were held in Tain, which also witnessed meetings of the justices of the peace. Fairs and markets attracted the lower classes for their social significance and a Masonic lodge and assembly rooms provided more prestigious social occasions, although Tain, in common with the other burghs of Easter Ross, was socially, as indeed commercially, 'overshadowed' by Inverness.<sup>133</sup>

Turning to the ecclesiastical sphere, again, like the secular arena, more complex than that appertaining in the Skye communities, the patron of the parish changed during the vacancy of 1794 to 1797. In 1794 Kenneth Mackenzie of Cromarty was the patron, but following his death Lady Elibank fulfilled the role. When Charles Calder Mackintosh became assistant to his father in 1828 he was presented by 'Cromartie,'<sup>134</sup> more explicitly identified by Duff as the Honourable Mrs. Hay Mackenzie of Cromarty.<sup>135</sup>

In the absence of a specific comprehensive list of heritors, identifying them is fraught with difficulty. Certainly, in contrast with Skye, they were more numerous and drawn from a variety of walks of life.

Records in the custody of the Town Clerk of the Royal Burgh of Tain include minutes of meetings of heritors. However, although lists of those present are embodied in the minutes, it cannot be definitively stated that all the heritors were in attendance. For example, on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1818, the following were present: 'Donald McLeod Esq. of Geanies, Hugh Rose Esq. of Glastullich, Hugh Ross Esq. of Aldie, William Murray Esq., Provost of Tain, Roderick McLeod Esq.' and an indecipherable personage 'of Cadboll.'<sup>136</sup> However, on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1845, the list is longer: 'Hugh Ross Esq. of Cromarty, Bailie Alexander Innes and for Captain

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<sup>133</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), pp.66-67.

<sup>134</sup> Macnaughton, Reverend Colin (1915), pp.294-296 and 342.

<sup>135</sup> Duff, Rev. Alexander (1877), p.58.

<sup>136</sup> Records in Custody of Town Clerk of Royal Burgh of Tain, Bundle 7/2.



Mackay Heirs and Mr. Murray Senior and Junior, Donald Munro, Donald Stewart Esquire for Cadbol and for Mrs. Stewart, William Mackenzie, Treasurer of the Burgh of Tain, Mr. Thomas Flint, Druggist, Tain and Mr. John Rose, Mason, Tain.' This displays quite clearly a mixture of landowners and the merchant class of Tain. Indeed, the professional class was also probably involved, as, within the body of the minutes, the name of 'Mr. Harry Taylor, Writer' appears, seemingly to be numbered among the heritors.<sup>137</sup>

Other sources likewise identify heritors, although none offer a clearly comprehensive list. Colin Macnaughton, quoting the records of the Presbytery of Tain, notes that on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1822, for example, the 'following representatives of the heritors and Magistrates were present, namely – Mr. George Murray, eldest Bailie of Tain; Mr. Donald Macleod of Geanies; and Bailie John Munro; and for the landward heritors, Mr. Hugh Rose of Glastullich, and Mr. Roderick Macleod, younger of Cadboll.'<sup>138</sup> Mackenzie, studying changes in land ownership in Ross-shire between 1756 and 1853, asserts that there were only 4 heritors in Tain in 1793, a number which had dropped to 3 by 1853.<sup>139</sup> This, however, would seem to represent the landward heritors, excluding those from within the burgh. On the other hand, the allocation of seats in the new church of Tain, addressed at a Town Council meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1823, indicated a long list of individuals, stating that priority should be given to 'heritors contributing most money.' Landowners included such personages as Robert Bruce Aeneas Macleod Esq. of Cadboll, Hugh Rose Esq. of Glastullich, Hugh Ross Esq. of Aldie, Donald Macleod Esq. of Geanies and Sir Charles Ross of Balnagown Bart. Also specified were the 'Magistrates and Council of the Burgh of Tain' and many other named individuals,<sup>140</sup> but how many of these were actually heritors is not made clear. Nonetheless, examining the various

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<sup>137</sup> Records in Custody of Town Clerk of Royal Burgh of Tain, Bundle 7/11.

<sup>138</sup> Macnaughton, Rev. Colin (1915), p.336.

<sup>139</sup> Mackenzie, Kenneth (1885-6), p.303.

<sup>140</sup> Council Book of Tain, B 70/6/2.

lists, it is apparent that a number of names, particularly those associated with specific estates, do recur regularly.

The interdependence of the secular body, the Town Council, and the ecclesiastical court of the Presbytery can be gleaned from the above paragraphs. As regards the Kirk Session, the existence of certain names within the eldership<sup>141</sup> which also occur within the list of bailies is suggestive of individuals exercising both roles, but there is a lack of irrefutable evidence in the sources to confirm this. Although elders were likely to have been drawn from among those of social standing within the community, it must be stressed that specific names would have been used repeatedly within a limited locality.

The inter-relationship of secular and ecclesiastical can be seen in the issue of patronage, a dispute arising in this field during the afore-mentioned vacancy of 1794 to 1797. On the death of the Reverend George Douglas in October 1794 the patron, Kenneth Mackenzie of Cromarty, presented Mr. James Fowler to the parish. However, the Presbytery was persuaded to delay 'consideration of the presentation' by the Provost of Tain 'in the name of the Magistrates and Town Council, the Deacon and Trades of the Burgh, and in the name of the Session and heads of families in the said town and parish.' In March 1795 a Royal presentation was made in favour of Mr. Angus McIntosh. During the confusion and delay which this situation occasioned the patron died and in 1797 Mr. Fowler withdrew. However, due to 'doubt about the legal patron,' the Presbytery could not 'proceed with the settlement' until the new patron, Lady Elibank, signalled her acceptance of the Royal presentation. As Mr. McIntosh was already known in the parish and supported by all heads of families the

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<sup>141</sup> Tain Church of Scotland, St. Duthus Church, Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/349/3; Tain Free Church Session Book, CH3/748/1.



Presbytery was able to proceed speedily with his admission to the charge, which took place in May 1797.<sup>142</sup>

Two other disputes occurred prior to the Disruption involving the Church, its practices and religio-political attitude, and its parishioners. Mowat asserts that, due to high seat rents in the parish church a number of parishioners were persuaded to 'build their own chapel in 1836, with assistance from the United Associate Synod.'<sup>143</sup> Although this bald assertion may hide unstated reasons contributing to this secession, nonetheless material trawled from a report published by the Commissioners of Religious Instruction, Scotland, in 1838 would suggest that the problem of seat rents was indeed the precipitating factor. Charles Calder Mackintosh, the minister, visited in September 1836, makes a number of allusions to the problems created for his poorer parishioners. He refers to the fact that 'there is a great want of sittings for the use of the paupers of the parish, who amount to 147, and a great many others, who are unable to pay seat rents. Many of them sit in the passages.' Mackintosh, quoting the rents as varying from 2s.6d. to 5s. per annum, adds that 'there is a strong and increasing feeling, on the part of the poor and working classes, against the payment of the rates charged, and even against any payment whatever – arising from their poverty and the circumstance that no seat rents were paid in the old parish church.'<sup>144</sup>

The fact that prominent lay figures may not always have been in accord with the religio-political stance of the Church in Tain is illustrated by the following announcement which appeared in the Inverness Courier on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1840. 'Mr. Hugh Ross, of Cromarty, Provost

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<sup>142</sup> Macnaughton, Rev. Colin (1915), pp.294-297.

<sup>143</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), p.121.

<sup>144</sup> Fourth Report of the Commissioners of Religious Instruction, Scotland (1838), pp.296-297.

of Tain, resigned office in consequence of the election of a non-intrusion Commissioner from that town to the General Assembly.’<sup>145</sup>

This last observation leads on to a consideration of those events and movements occurring during the months prior to the Disruption which can be traced in the sources available. At the level of the Synod, the Synod of Ross, despite some ministers advocating caution over pressing for the removal of patronage, it was voted on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1842 to submit an overture to the General Assembly urging the abolition of the 1712 Patronage Act, as they considered patronage to be ‘unfairly and oppressively exercised.’<sup>146</sup>

Although relevant Kirk Session records are unavailable, the strength of support for the non-intrusion position and for the abolition of patronage is clearly revealed in sources relating to proceedings of the Presbytery. In October 1842 ‘the Presbytery unanimously agreed to overture the General Assembly to renew their protest against the Act of Queen Anne, 1712.’<sup>147</sup> On March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1843 an ‘extraordinary meeting’ was held for ‘prayer and conference, in reference to the present state of the Church.’ Only one member was missing and ‘elders and friends from the different parishes around’ were also in attendance. The Witness, totally supportive of the Evangelical stance, stresses that the people were displaying the ‘fruits of their many and long-continued privileges’ in ministry and adds that a Presbyterial Committee of Finance was formed ‘composed of elders and others friendly to the cause, from all the different parishes in the bounds.’<sup>148</sup> The final meeting of the Presbytery prior to the Disruption took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> April, the members unanimously resolving to ‘form themselves into a committee in connection with a Provisional Committee of Ministers and Elders in Edinburgh, the Committee to consist of all the members of Presbytery, together with representative elders

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<sup>145</sup> Barron, James (1913), p.272.

<sup>146</sup> Minutes of the Synod of Ross, CH2/312/6, pp.353-354; Inverness Courier, April 27<sup>th</sup> 1842.

<sup>147</sup> Macnaughton, Rev. Colin (1915), p.380.

<sup>148</sup> The Witness, Vol.IV, No 336, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1843.



from each parish.' At that time the ruling elder was Donald Williamson, a writer in Tain, but, although he was elected to attend the General Assembly, he intimated in early May his inability to attend.<sup>149</sup>

The strength of support for the impending Disruption within the parish of Tain itself is clearly illustrated in the report published in *The Witness* on April 26<sup>th</sup> 1843, apprising its nationwide readership of the formation of an association 'for the maintenance of a Free Presbyterian Church in our land, and for the purpose of building a Church in town.' As well as L.500 having been so far 'subscribed for the Church,' the erection of a 'tent' made of 'slab deals' was already underway on the 'Links of Tain for the worthy and respected minister of the parish to preach in during the summer, and when the Church is building.'<sup>150</sup>

The minister's stance on the religio-political situation was firm. Although recognising the 'value of a rightly constituted establishment' he did not consider any 'external advantages the State afforded would justify the surrender by the Church of her freedom to obey all the will of her divine Lord.' The young son of an elder, being instructed by his father to take a newspaper to the minister, found the Reverend Mackintosh in the manse porch with his own copy of the *Times*, a radiant smile on his face. Some weeks later the lad discovered that the newspaper that day had reported on the vote in the House of Commons, 'finally refusing an inquiry into the affairs of the Scottish Church,' thus making the Disruption certain. Charles Calder Mackintosh did indeed 'come out,' quitting his manse. Within the pages of his own diary is inscribed the following words: "1843, May 18<sup>th</sup>. – A memorable day for Scotland. Separated, with all my heart, from the State." Although a vast majority of his parishioners 'accompanied him out,' the patroness, the Honourable Mrs. Hay Mackenzie of Cromarty, patron of many Ross-shire parishes, who had 'always made her presentations a matter of conscience, so that she naturally

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<sup>149</sup> Macnaughton, Rev. Colin (1915), pp.380-381.

<sup>150</sup> *The Witness*, Vol.IV., April 26<sup>th</sup> 1843.

did not see the necessity for the Disruption,' expressed regret at the departure of "all her ministers" from the Establishment.<sup>151</sup>

The Inverness Courier of June 14<sup>th</sup> 1843 reports on the minister's farewell sermon in the Establishment and his explanation of the events surrounding the Disruption and reasons for separating from the State. Although the church was 'pretty full,' few of the 'neighbouring gentry' were present. The congregation was, however, fully prepared for the situation now accruing. A week later the paper records the Reverend Mackintosh's first sermon in the new Free Church, the attendance being 'large.' The minister enlarged upon the religio-political background, reading the 'long address, issued by the Free Church Assembly,' exhorting the congregation to be 'fully persuaded in their own minds, as to the reasons that induced them to dissent, and to be prepared to answer for themselves.'<sup>152</sup> The description available of this first service in the Free Church conveys a picture of a dignified and impressive occasion. The congregation 'met with' the minister, 'in a wooden building, hurriedly erected, even the magistrates of the town, preceded by their red-coated, halbert-armed officers, walking in procession, and taking their place of honour in the Free, as they were wont to do in the Established Church.'<sup>153</sup>

A number of sources reveal that the wooden building, referred to above, had been ready and available for worship by mid-June. Both The Witness and the Inverness Courier, for example, carry reports dated June 7<sup>th</sup> concerning its erection, the latter commenting that 'carpenters busy to-day putting the roof on a temporary wooden Church, which will, I think, be finished in

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<sup>151</sup> Duff, Rev. Alexander (1877), pp.56-59.

<sup>152</sup> Inverness Courier, June 14<sup>th</sup> and June 21<sup>st</sup> 1843.

<sup>153</sup> Brown, Rev. Thomas (1892), p.221.



a few days.' The Courier also comments that the minister had left his manse and 'taken a house close to his splendid, but now desolate and forsaken church.'<sup>154</sup>

Progress in establishing the Free Church in Tain was swift. No problems of site refusal marred this progress. At the end of June a number of ladies in the town, according to the Inverness Courier, presented the minister with 'an elegantly-bound pulpit Bible and Psalm Book, which are to be used in the Free Church.' On August 30<sup>th</sup> it was reported that the foundation-stone for the new church had been laid.<sup>155</sup> A retrospective reference to this building is contained in a pamphlet written in 1992, in which the church is described as being an "Edinburgh Plan" edifice, built to a specific and basic design, its low ceiling causing 'problems for the crowds who used to attend.'<sup>156</sup> The church was opened by the Reverend Doctor McDonald on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1843.<sup>157</sup>

The popularity of the new Free Church in Tain can be gleaned from information furnished in the preceding paragraphs, but the sources have failed to disclose the exact numbers involved. Mowat asserts that 'in parishes like Tain, where the congregation were following their ministers over eighty per cent of the population seceded,'<sup>158</sup> a population which, official statistics state, comprised 3128 souls in 1841.<sup>159</sup> Certainly the entire eldership of the Established Church signed the Act of Demission and adhered to the Free Church.<sup>160</sup>

The Establishment, on the other hand, was supported by comparatively few. In this instance, it appears that quoted numbers represent the agendas of the writers concerned. For example, an anonymous correspondent addressing the editor of The Witness asserts that the northern newspapers were hostile to the Free Church and tended to exaggerate the size of Establishment

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<sup>154</sup> The Witness, Vol.IV., June 7<sup>th</sup> 1843; Inverness Courier, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1843.

<sup>155</sup> Inverness Courier, July 5<sup>th</sup> and August 30<sup>th</sup> 1843.

<sup>156</sup> The Passing Century – Tain Parish Church 1892-1992 (1992).

<sup>157</sup> The Free Church Magazine, Vol.I., 1844, p.352.

<sup>158</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), p.122.

<sup>159</sup> Numbers of the Inhabitants in the Years 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851, Scotland (1852), pp.88-89.

<sup>160</sup> Tain Free Church Session Book, CH3/748/1.

congregations. Having his own bias, he affirms, in relation to Tain, that only 80 people, who were counted as they left, constituted the congregation on the one occasion since the Disruption when a sermon was preached in the Parish Church – and not the 150 or 200 quoted in the newspapers. Even this number was augmented by ‘Residuaries’ from surrounding parishes and, as he asserts, ‘only a very insignificant congregation awaits’ the new presentee, who had not yet made his appearance.<sup>161</sup> The vacancy was not filled until 12<sup>th</sup> March 1844, when Mr. Lewis Rose was presented to the parish.<sup>162</sup>

A few more points of interest will be raised before concluding this exploration into the ecclesiastical situation in Tain around the time of the Disruption, as far as it can be traced in the sources available. Proceedings of the first General Assembly of the Free Church reveal that the Reverend Charles Calder Mackintosh had been a member of the committee ‘appointed to consider the course to be adopted for effecting the separation from the Establishment.’ Additionally, he was to be attached to the ‘Committee for receiving applications of Ministers and Probationers for adherence,’ as well as participating in the Special Commission ‘for the purpose of carrying out the objects recommended in the Report on Interim Supplies of Ordinances.’<sup>163</sup> Likewise, the anxiety of this fully committed minister to involve his congregation fully within the embrace of the Free Church is reflected in the fact that the ‘Sacrament of the Lords Supper’ was administered in early July 1843.<sup>164</sup>

### Strath.

Strath constitutes the community where, in complete contrast to Tain, the minister and the vast majority of his parishioners remained within the Establishment. The parish at that time

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<sup>161</sup> The Witness, Vol.IV., No.398, October 18<sup>th</sup> 1843.

<sup>162</sup> Macnaughton, Rev. Colin (1915), p.397.

<sup>163</sup> Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland Convened at Edinburgh May 1843 with the Proceedings of That Assembly (1852), Acts, p.50; Proceedings, pp.63 and 68.

<sup>164</sup> The Free Church Session Book, CH3/748/1, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1843.



consisted essentially of small rural townships, many of them crofting settlements. Located to the south of the Cuillin Mountains which straddle the central belt of Skye, it possessed numerous inaccessible districts due to sub-mountainous conditions and this presented the Church with considerable communication difficulties. Lacking a significant focus in the sense of a burgh or even multi-functional village like its neighbour, Portree, its inhabitants eked out a Spartan existence on poor land. Thus, unlike Tain, the occupational profile was fairly limited, its educational facilities somewhat rudimentary, its linguistic situation that of a predominantly Gaelic-speaking population and its simple secular governance reflecting its position as a typical Highland rural community. Below the level of the two landowners was a small class of tacksman or tenant farmers, the bulk of the population renting minute tracts of land or even being totally landless.

The greater part of the parish lay within the estates of Lord Macdonald, his affairs being handled locally by his factor on Skye, not resident in Strath. A small area in the west of the parish was owned by Mr. McAllister. Although the latter, unlike Lord Macdonald, was sometimes resident on his estate, his local factor managed its running on his behalf.

Within the ecclesiastical sphere, the identity of the patron is quite clear: it was the Crown.<sup>165</sup>

As regards the heritors, The New Statistical Account, penned by the minister, the Reverend John Mackinnon, affirms that the two landowners, Lord Macdonald and Mr. McAllister of Strathaird, were the only two existing in the parish.<sup>166</sup>

No history of any patronage or similar disputes within the ecclesiastical framework of Strath has been uncovered in the sources. However, the sometimes difficult inter-relationship between the secular arm in the personages of the landowners and the ecclesiastical personnel can be seen in references to the submission of plans for a manse in 1786 and 1812 by the

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<sup>165</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), p.226; The New Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol.XIV (1845), p.312.

<sup>166</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol.XIV (1845), p.304.

minister via the Presbytery to these two individuals, who bore responsibility for the provision of church and manse.<sup>167</sup> The lack of success in obtaining a manse is revealed in the statement in *The New Statistical Account* that there has 'never been a manse in this parish.'<sup>168</sup> Again, problems accrued in gaining the necessary financial remuneration for the minister, records showing that in 1815 the incumbent had commenced proceedings in court against the heritors for augmentation of his stipend. On the other hand, the request for a new and larger church to replace a 'ruinous' and inadequate building met with greater success, the original move in 1832<sup>169</sup> coming to fruition in the construction of the new church in Broadford in 1840.<sup>170</sup>

Little has been uncovered in the sources relating to events and movements occurring over the months leading up to the Disruption. This could be significant in the sense that the momentous event scarcely touched the lives of parishioners, but firm conclusions should not be taken from lack of evidence. It should be noted at this juncture that there are no extant Kirk Session records for the period being studied.

At Synod level, the Synod involved being that of Glenelg, nothing of note was recorded prior to the Disruption, although there is an interesting entry on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1843 concerning Gaelic Schools Society teachers. Unfortunately the record does not specify exactly where the teachers were located, but they abhor the attempts of such men to 'withdraw the people of the Parishes within their bounds from their adherence to the Established Church' and they 'deem it their duty to bring the matter under the notice of the Education Committee of the General Assembly' in order that they may address the problem.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> *Presbytery of Skye Records*, CH2/330/2, pp.1-14 and 277-284.

<sup>168</sup> *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol.XIV (1845), p.312.

<sup>169</sup> *Presbytery of Skye Records*, CH2/330/2, pp.325-326; CH2/330/3, pp.309-311.

<sup>170</sup> Barron, James (1907), p.272.

<sup>171</sup> *Synod of Glenelg Minutes*, CH2/568/4, pp.271-272.



Within the Presbytery, Strath's minister intimated in January 1842 that, as the Veto Act 'has been found illegal by the highest civil tribunal of this country' it should be ignored in the 'settlement of Presentees within the bounds of this Presbytery.'<sup>172</sup> Such a motion would win the approval of the heavily Moderate Presbytery. On 4<sup>th</sup> April 1843 it was agreed that the names of two 'quoad sacra' ministers in the Presbytery should be removed from its roll, as the Court of Session had lately decreed that such ministers were not 'constituent members of Church Courts,' a decision opposed in the Presbytery meeting by the Reverend Roderick MacLeod, an ardent advocate of the Evangelical cause.<sup>173</sup> His was one of three names from their ranks appearing on the Act of Separation and Deed of Demission, as announced at the meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> June 1843,<sup>174</sup> the majority of the Presbytery, including the Strath minister, having remained in the Establishment.

Scant evidence has been traced in the sources concerning evangelical activity in Strath during the months prior to the Disruption. There is reference to an evangelical minister preaching in Strathaird and then in the church at Broadford in October 1842 at the tail end of the revival which swept the north of the island. Although the people seemed eager to hear him, the incident incurred the minister's displeasure and the event does not appear to have affected reactions to the Disruption in Strath.<sup>175</sup> Lamont also refers to the fact that some 'able ministers and some Divinity doctors were haranguing crowds not far from the Broadford church' in the summer of 1843, the crowds listening attentively to the orators. He then relates that a 'meeting of Session was called,' the minister leaving it to the 'wisdom' of the elders as to how they would react to the Disruption, stating when asked that he was an old man, has 'seen the end of many a change' and that he 'proposed to remain in the old Church.' The elders unanimously

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<sup>172</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/33/4, p.5.

<sup>173</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/4, pp.24-25.

<sup>174</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/4, pp.26-28.

<sup>175</sup> Taylor, Steve (1997), p.2.

agreed to remain with him, as indeed did the bulk of the congregation.<sup>176</sup> This report, by admission, relies on oral tradition. Although tallying with the documented reaction of minister and parishioners, the timing of these incidents in relation to the Disruption is not clear.

The position of the minister as a Moderate has been identified above, a position which the evangelical writer, MacCowan, deprecates, blaming Mackinnon for preventing his parishioners, whom the cleric had praised for remaining in the Establishment, from 'raising a testimony for the truth.'<sup>177</sup> Geikie, the geologist, a frequent visitor to the Strath manse, observes that it was Mackinnon's powerful influence which kept his people 'in the pale of the Establishment,'<sup>178</sup> an assertion which will be considered among other data to be explored in this study.

In the immediate aftermath of the Disruption, therefore, the situation was one of overwhelming support for the Establishment. There was scant interest in the Free Church. Although the Annals of the Free Church of Scotland affirm that the parish was served after the Disruption by catechists,<sup>179</sup> no date is given for the commencement of their activity. Indeed, a negative view, from a Free Church perspective, is painted in another Free Church source. The Reverend Donald Cameron, visiting Strath in 1850, refers to the visit of a 'very able and respected minister' a 'few years ago' (again date unspecified), who found himself preaching to a mere handful of folk and had pronounced that it was 'really in vain to send them a missionary or a minister.'<sup>180</sup>

The Reverend John Mackinnon would also have been involved in assisting in the three Skye Presbytery parishes where the ministers had entered the Free Church. The Presbytery Records

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<sup>176</sup> Lamont, Rev. D. (1913, reprinted 1984), pp.94-95.

<sup>177</sup> MacCowan, Roderick (1902), p.203.

<sup>178</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), p.96.

<sup>179</sup> Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, Vol.II. (1914), p.233.

<sup>180</sup> The Home and Foreign Record of the Free Church of Scotland, Vol.I (1851), p.224.



illustrate this, the entry dated 12<sup>th</sup> July 1843 stating that other ministers were to help with supply,' 'Mr. McKinnon to preach at Snizort on the 30<sup>th</sup> instant and to intimate the vacancy in that parish.'<sup>181</sup>

The Free Church did ultimately gain a foothold in Strath, in the district of Strathaird, the area furthest from the parish church, which was located in Broadford. The heritor there, Mr. McAllister, granted the site, persuaded by the Free Church supporter, Dr. McAllister, the 'only resident man of education,' according to Lord Macdonald's factor, speaking to a Committee on sites for churches in 1847, four years after the Disruption. He adds that no minister had been appointed, although the church had been ready for over a year. As regards Lord Macdonald's estate, by far the larger section of the parish, 'probably less than 100 adults' adhered to the Free Church.<sup>182</sup> Even allowing for some Free Church interest in Strathaird, where the inhabitants were considerably fewer in number than in the populous areas around Broadford, this remains a still fairly insubstantial Free Church following in a parish whose population increased slightly from 3,150 in 1841 to 3,243 in 1851.<sup>183</sup> This is a very different situation from that accruing in its neighbour, the parish of Portree.

### Portree.

The minister of Portree, Coll Macdonald, in common with the minister of Strath, remained within the Establishment. However, a majority of his parishioners left his flock and adhered to the Free Church. It was a parish bearing many similarities to its neighbour in that it consisted principally of small rural, mainly crofting, townships. However, unlike Strath, whose attendant islands Pabbay and Scalpay were sparsely populated, the islands attached to the parish of Portree, particularly Raasay, carried a more numerous population. Adding together the

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<sup>181</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/4, p.30.

<sup>182</sup> Reports from Committees (9): Sites for Churches (Scotland), (1847), 3<sup>rd</sup> Report, pp.49 and 56.

<sup>183</sup> Numbers of the Inhabitants in the Years 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851 (Scotland) (1852), pp.80-81.

dramatic split occasioned by the Sound of Raasay, an extensive sea coast, with intermittent cliffs, plus considerable areas of hill slopes, this parish topographically presents a scenario of considerable communication problems.

In contrast to Strath, the section on Skye itself contained the modest multi-functional village of Portree, housing within its bounds diminutive merchant and professional classes. However, a majority of parishioners scratched a meagre living on poor land. Consequently, despite Portree possessing an intermittently used court-house and jail, its occupational profile was essentially not dissimilar to that of Strath. Its communication difficulties, educational and linguistic situation and secular governance reveal it to have been, like Strath, a fairly typical Highland rural community.

Portree even shared a landowner with its neighbour, the Skye sector of the parish being within the estates of Lord Macdonald. Raasay, with its attendant islands, was in the hands of MacLeod of Raasay, who, unlike Macdonald, spent a considerable proportion of his time living on this estate. However, due to being made bankrupt, he was forced to sell the islands in November 1843.<sup>184</sup> They passed into the hands of George Rainy, an Edinburgh businessman who was a staunch supporter of the Free Church. Both estates were handled by factors, that of MacLeod living within the parish, whereas Lord Macdonald's man was based elsewhere in Skye.

Turning to the ecclesiastical sphere, the patron was again, as in the case of Strath, the Crown.<sup>185</sup> The heritors were likewise the two landowners, Lord Macdonald and MacLeod of Raasay.<sup>186</sup> A similar picture to that in Strath emerges not only concerning lack of evidence in the sources for patronage disputes prior to the Disruption but also problematical relationships

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<sup>184</sup> Inverness Courier, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1843.

<sup>185</sup> Moral Statistics of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland (1826), p.xxxvii; Sinclair, Sir John (1795), p.155.

<sup>186</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), p.155.



between heritors and Presbytery members. There were protracted and often bitter wranglings concerning the provision of an adequate church and manse for the parish. The Reverend Alexander Campbell submitted pleas for improved accommodation for himself and his family between 1806 and 1810. Following his sudden death in 1811 (from a fall down the manse stairs!) there are numerous entries which show the constant struggles his successor underwent in order to obtain repairs and improvements to the manse, examples occurring between 1820 and 1832.<sup>187</sup> The fight to replace a ruinous, dangerous and inadequate church building with a suitable edifice occupies many pages of the Presbytery Records between 1810 and 1819, at which date work was signalled to go ahead. Although Lord Macdonald took a dilatory approach to the accommodation question, greater antipathy was displayed by MacLeod on the grounds that his tenants would not benefit from the proposed building works.<sup>188</sup>

Again little evidence of pre-Disruption activity has been traced for Portree, certainly insufficient to paint a truly vivid picture of those preceding months. The Synod discussion of July 1843 and the Presbytery reaction to 'quoad sacra' ministers in April 1843 have already been examined within the profile appertaining to Strath, as Portree likewise lay within the Synod of Glenelg and Presbytery of Skye. The Presbytery motion to ignore the Veto Act as illegal, moved by the Reverend Mackinnon, as alluded to with regard to Strath, was recorded on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1842, seconded by the Reverend Coll Macdonald, minister of Portree, and carried.<sup>189</sup>

Although there are no available Kirk Session records prior to 1854, a few happenings within the parish and certain attitudes have been trawled from other sources. A religious revival

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<sup>187</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/2, pp.204-208, 246-247 and 421-423; CH2/330/3, pp.18-27 and 288-289.

<sup>188</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/2, pp.243-245, 248-250, 327-328, 331-332, 336-339, 343-344, 346, 349-350, 357-358 and 394.

<sup>189</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/4, p.8.

which started in Waternish in 1841<sup>190</sup> gradually spread across the north of the island. The Reverend Fraser from Kirkhill, near Inverness, answered the call for more ministers to assist in the revival and was highly impressed by his experience of preaching at Sconser, in the parish of Portree, in October 1842. The thirst for evangelical preaching during this period of 'heightened spiritual fervour' was reflected in the distances people travelled and, in this case, despite the discomfort of wet weather and the necessity of sitting on the 'shingle of the sea-shore, the demand for a further sermon.'<sup>191</sup>

The Presbytery Records contain various references in 1842 and early 1843 to a missionary minister appointed by the Royal Bounty Committee assisting the Reverend Macdonald, principally on Raasay but also on Skye itself. His religio-political stance, however, is not disclosed.<sup>192</sup> The minister, as an earlier observation has demonstrated, as well as his behaviour at the Disruption, supported the view of the Moderates. He seriously misjudged, however, the leanings of his parishioners, stating in 1841 that their attachment to the Established Church was 'inviolable.'<sup>193</sup> Nicolson affirms that 'in the bitterness of the strife that centred around the Disruption his name was much maligned, while from the great numbers that defected from his charge, it would appear that his ministry failed to appeal to those who were carried away by the new evangelical movement in this part of Skye.'<sup>194</sup> As MacCowan asserts, and his assertion will be investigated more thoroughly later in this study, 'godly elders, catechists, and Gaelic teachers' had a powerful influence and were held in high regard for their piety,<sup>195</sup> an

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<sup>190</sup> Meek, Donald E. (1998a), p.126; MacRae, the Rev. Alexander (n.d.), pp.75-77.

<sup>191</sup> Taylor, Steve (1997), pp.1-2.

<sup>192</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/4, pp.4,15,22 and 25-26.

<sup>193</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol.XIV (1845), p.225.

<sup>194</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.252.

<sup>195</sup> MacCowan, Roderick (1902), p.83.



intimation of a strong lay role in parishes such as Portree. Indeed it is noted that certain teachers in the parish signed the Act of Demission.<sup>196</sup>

Donald Mackinnon makes the following bald statements: 'Mr. Coll Macdonald remained in the Establishment. Almost all his congregation adhered to the Free Church.'<sup>197</sup> Although no Free Church Presbytery or Kirk Session records for the appropriate period have been discovered, a number of sources reveal information about the immediate post-Disruption situation in the parish. The Reverend Roderick MacLeod's submission to the Select Committee on Sites for Churches in 1847 states that approximately 1,100 souls adhered to the Free Church in the district of Portree out of a population of approximately 2,500. Later he adds that all the residents of Raasay, nearly another 1,000 folk, had supported the Free Church.<sup>198</sup> This represents a high proportion of the inhabitants, who numbered 3, 574 in 1841 and 3,557 in 1851.<sup>199</sup> No figures are available for numbers remaining in the Establishment.

Following the Disruption the Reverend MacLeod, who was minister of the neighbouring parish of Snizort, 'formed the seceding people' in Portree 'into a congregation and ordained elders.' He himself would preach in Portree on Sabbath evenings 'after he had officiated in his own church' and continued to minister to the Portree adherents for six years, the first Free Church minister only being appointed in 1849.<sup>200</sup>

In 1847 it was recorded that Lord Macdonald was still refusing to provide a site on his estate in the parish of Portree, although his factor affirms that the proprietor 'has never interfered with them,' which was within his rights as owner of the land. The building in which the congregation worshipped was 'at one time used as a Gaelic school-house' and was later

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<sup>196</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/4, p.29.

<sup>197</sup> Mackinnon, Rev. Donald (?1906), p.22.

<sup>198</sup> Reports from Committees: (9): Sites for Churches (Scotland), (1847), 3<sup>rd</sup> Report, pp.34 and 36.

<sup>199</sup> Numbers of the Inhabitants in the Years 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851 (Scotland), (1852), pp.80-81.

<sup>200</sup> Mackinnon, Rev. Donald (?1906), pp.27 and 28.

extended. Built of 'loose stones, pointed with lime, thatched with straw or rushes,' it was waterproof and 'fitted up with seats,' holding all the Free Church adherents.<sup>201</sup>

The situation in Raasay was somewhat different. According to Sharpe, the new proprietor, George Rainy, 'reserved the use of the church in Raasay,' built originally for the Established Church, 'for the Free Church,' the Established clergyman being refused admittance. Sharpe continues by declaring that 'initially the spiritual needs of the Raasay congregation were then served either by probationers and catechists or by visiting ministers from Skye,' the first minister to be appointed, the Reverend William MacDougall, not being ordained there until November 1851.<sup>202</sup> The apparently wholesale adherence of the Raasay population to the Free Church is claimed by MacCowan to have been 'the result of the instruction, on the principles at stake in the Ten Years' Conflict, disseminated by the "men".'<sup>203</sup>

A final disquieting note should be struck before concluding this brief profile. In common with other parishes in the Highlands where the proprietor was hostile to the Free Church, references exist which disclose the fact that tenants of this parish were evicted because of their adherence to the new Church. Nicolson, for example, affirms that Macdonald or his representatives, scornfully rejecting petitions from Portree folk for a site for a church, showed such bitterness towards the Free Church that numbers of people were evicted solely because they were adherents.<sup>204</sup> Ansdell, indeed, quotes the case of a certain Donald Matheson of Portree who was given notice to quit his home and holdings because he had collected donations for the Free Church sustentation fund. Despite heroic efforts to appeal to Lord Macdonald in person, he was unsuccessful.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Reports from Committees (9): Sites for Churches (Scotland) (1847), 1<sup>st</sup> Report, p.6; 3<sup>rd</sup> Report, pp.49 and 56.

<sup>202</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), pp.186-187 and 73.

<sup>203</sup> MacCowan, Roderick (1902), p.36.

<sup>204</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.251.

<sup>205</sup> Ansdell, Douglas (1998), pp.68-69.



**Summary.**

This chapter has examined briefly the rationale for the study, the sources employed, the methodology and the selection of the communities, followed by an exploration into the pre-Disruption scenario in the three parishes. The enquiry into the complex influences and forces operating within these parishes will commence in the next chapter with an investigation into their socio-economic environments.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND:

#### SETTING, POPULATION, COMMUNICATION, OCCUPATION & DOMESTIC MILIEU.

The reactions of individuals or communities to an event or movement within one sphere of their lives are affected, in variable measure, by their experiences within other areas of their daily existence. Consequently the natural environment, the numbers and distribution of their neighbours and the geographical ability or inability to communicate with them together with the local occupational structure could impact on their attitudes to religious issues. Additionally, the domestic milieu, whether of comfort or privation, would serve as another factor among many in the total life situation which could have a bearing on attitudes and beliefs, whether inherited or newly developed. Consequently, this chapter will also glance briefly at information furnishing clues about the domestic environment, concentrating on housing, but cursorily considering the range of other material elements, specifically diet, household artifacts and clothing. Such investigation reflects the research thrust of this study, the discernment of the interplay of various factors and influences which could have shaped local Disruption reaction. The scene will be set by a brief initial description of the physical environment.

#### Tain.

‘There are few tracts of country more pleasing and of a more cheerful aspect, than that between the firths of Tain and of Cromarty....’<sup>206</sup> according to MacCulloch, whose works describe journeys undertaken between 1811 and 1821. A guidebook to the Highlands and

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<sup>206</sup> MacCulloch, John (1824), Volume II, p.478.



Islands, published in 1834, homes in on the area immediately surrounding the burgh of Tain, asserting that ‘the fields about the town are rich and cheerful,’ although pointing out that, despite its proximity to the sea, the ‘extensive shoals and sandbanks’ of the Dornoch Firth ‘prevent it from having a harbour.’<sup>207</sup> The burgh itself is dismissed by MacCulloch as being ‘an insignificant town,’<sup>208</sup> an observation to be appreciated within the context of the wider Scottish scene. The 1834 guidebook paints the town as ‘irregularly built,’ ‘containing about 2000 inhabitants’ and possessing ‘several new and handsome houses.’<sup>209</sup>

Such contemporaneous writings furnish an introduction to the first community under investigation, the Easter Ross parish of Tain. However, they omit the third component of the parish, the small fishing village of Inver, which would probably have held little interest to the audiences they were addressing. Tain was essentially a parish dominated by its burgh, with an associated fairly successful agricultural area and the relatively unimportant fishing hamlet. As introduced in the previous chapter, together with these elements it was topographically low-lying with few inherent geographical difficulties of communication between its constituent parts. This feature, plus its relatively compact nature and location close to the north-east coast of Scotland, are factors to be considered in connection with reaction to the Disruption.

### **Portree.**

The other two parishes, both situated on Skye, a Hebridean island lying off the north-west coast, display somewhat different profiles. Portree, in the north, seemingly shared one characteristic with Tain, in that a specific community, the village of Portree itself, was of more significance than the rest, which were merely tiny rural townships. However, there the similarity ends. Portree, although described by contemporary travellers as a town, was merely

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<sup>207</sup> Anderson, George and Peter (1834), p.505.

<sup>208</sup> MacCulloch, John (1824), Volume II, p.478.

<sup>209</sup> Anderson, George and Peter (1834), p.505.

a village containing only a few hundred souls in 1841,<sup>210</sup> but nonetheless possessed of a 'very good harbour.'<sup>211</sup> Lord Teignmouth, writing about tours undertaken in 1827 and 1829, notes the 'neat and well-constructed houses,' the facilities of church, inn and jail, and its striking contrast with the 'generally dreary aspect of the island.'<sup>212</sup> Although the rest of the parish could be regarded as unified in its pattern of minute townships, whose inhabitants generally combined small-scale cultivation on fairly poor land with animal husbandry and fishing, geographically it comprised several disparate areas. A small sector lay to the north of Portree village, with a larger section to its south. However, a notable part of the parish was located on nearby islands, principally Raasay and Rona, with cultivable land being somewhat scarce, that on Raasay lying generally on the 'tops of the high eastern cliffs.'<sup>213</sup> The significance of this topographically dramatic split in the parish in relation to the research questions embodied in this study will be explored as the investigation proceeds. An extensive seacoast, with intermittent cliffs, plus considerable areas of hill slopes, as referred to in the previous chapter, completes the cursory picture of the terrain encompassed within the parish bounds.

### **Strath.**

As intimated in the last chapter, the third parish, Strath, was located to the south of the Cuillin Mountains which straddle the central belt of Skye. Although possessing more inaccessible districts due to sub-mountainous conditions, unlike Portree it principally consisted of a mainland area, the one or two small islands attached to it being barely inhabited. As mentioned earlier, in common with Portree its inhabitants dwelt in widely scattered tiny townships, eking out a Spartan existence on poor land. However, unlike the other two parishes, it lacked, during the period under consideration, a significant focus in the sense of a

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<sup>210</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.231.

<sup>211</sup> MacCulloch, John (1824), Volume III, p.366.

<sup>212</sup> Teignmouth, Lord (1836), p.148.

<sup>213</sup> MacCulloch, John (1824), Volume III, p.360.



burgh or multi-functional village. In the late 1820s Lord Teignmouth records only a few houses at Broadford, the village which later became the principal settlement in the parish,<sup>214</sup> and the 1834 guide registers 'only three houses and the inn.'<sup>215</sup> Allowing for difficulties that travellers from elsewhere would have experienced in identifying the bounds of scattered communities, it nevertheless underlines the lack of an unequivocally definable focus in Strath. Such a factor should be recalled when considering the impact of religious movements on the parish.

The three parishes were thus dissimilar geographically, but before investigating the relationship this may have had with their communication patterns and occupational profiles, it is valid to undertake comparisons concerning population. The quantitative element can be treated in a fairly straightforward manner, but distribution is closely interwoven with the above-mentioned facets and thus contains complex dynamics.

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<sup>214</sup> Teignmouth, Lord (1836), p.121.

<sup>215</sup> Anderson, George and Peter (1834), p.456.

**Population Size.****Table 1. Census Figures for the Three Parishes: 1811-1841.<sup>216</sup>**

<b>Date of census enumeration</b>	<b>Strath</b>		<b>Portree</b>		<b>Tain</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>% increase/ decrease</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% increase/ decrease</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% increase/ decrease</b>
<b>1811</b>	2107	Not available	2729	Not available	2384	Not available
<b>1821</b>	2619	+24.3%	3174	+16.3%	2861	+20%
<b>1831</b>	2962	+13.1%	3441	+8.4%	3078	+7.6%
<b>1841</b>	3150	+6.4%	3574	+3.9%	3128	+1.6%
<b>Overall % increase</b>		+49.5%		+31%		+31.2%

Although Table 1 indicates a general tendency for population increase in the three parishes, the pattern and levels differ. The decelerating rate of population growth in Tain is claimed to be due partly to emigration and partly to the devastating impact of an outbreak of cholera in the village of Inver.<sup>217</sup> Despite a commonly acknowledged contention that the region was significantly affected by clearance and emigration, population increase continued in Portree and Strath, although slowing down over the decades. Strath's peak, however, was reached in 1837, when 3,450 persons resided in the parish, an emigration of about two hundred individuals occurring between 1837 and 1840. Regarding the background to population increase, this was undoubtedly somewhat complex and would have included such factors as

<sup>216</sup> Numbers of the Inhabitants in the Years 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851, Scotland (1852).

<sup>217</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.292.



subdivision of plots, longevity and a rise in the birth rate.<sup>218</sup> Improving sanitary conditions may have been a contributory cause of population rise in all three parishes, inward migration and increasing trade being possibilities in Tain and Portree.

The minister of Tain, already noted to have been a comparatively compact parish, can be seen to have been serving a similar number of parishioners to his counterpart in Strath and less than the incumbent in Portree. As these latter parishes were geographically extensive and, as indicated earlier, encumbered by problems of accessibility, the impact on dissemination of the Word requires serious consideration within the plethora of possible contributory factors for specific reactions to the Disruption.

The possibility that the sex-balance within the three communities might have been significant was also considered, as Table 2 demonstrates.

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<sup>218</sup> MacKinnon, Neil J. (1981), p.176.

**Table 2. Sex Balance of the Population in the Three Parishes: 1811-1841.<sup>219</sup>**

<b>Date of Census Enumeration</b>	<b>1811</b>	<b>1821</b>	<b>1831</b>	<b>1841</b>
<b>STRATH</b>				
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>2107</b>	<b>2619</b>	<b>2962</b>	<b>3150</b>
<b>Males</b>	<b>1004</b>	<b>1259</b>	<b>1408</b>	<b>1480</b>
<b>Females</b>	<b>1103</b>	<b>1360</b>	<b>1554</b>	<b>1670</b>
<b>Male %</b>	<b>47.65</b>	<b>48.07</b>	<b>47.54</b>	<b>46.99</b>
<b>Female %</b>	<b>52.35</b>	<b>51.93</b>	<b>52.46</b>	<b>53.01</b>
<b>PORTREE</b>				
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>2729</b>	<b>3174</b>	<b>3441</b>	<b>3574</b>
<b>Males</b>	<b>1341</b>	<b>1531</b>	<b>1637</b>	<b>1644</b>
<b>Females</b>	<b>1388</b>	<b>1643</b>	<b>1804</b>	<b>1930</b>
<b>Male %</b>	<b>49.14</b>	<b>48.24</b>	<b>47.57</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Female %</b>	<b>50.86</b>	<b>51.76</b>	<b>52.43</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>TAIN</b>				
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>2384</b>	<b>2861</b>	<b>3078</b>	<b>3128</b>
<b>Males</b>	<b>1061</b>	<b>1356</b>	<b>1413</b>	<b>1447</b>
<b>Females</b>	<b>1323</b>	<b>1505</b>	<b>1665</b>	<b>1681</b>
<b>Male %</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>47.4</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>46.26</b>
<b>Female %</b>	<b>55.5</b>	<b>52.6</b>	<b>54.1</b>	<b>53.74</b>

<sup>219</sup> Numbers of the Inhabitants in the Years 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851 Scotland, (1852).



However, as far as gender is concerned the demographic pattern was roughly the same in all parishes, particularly in 1831 and 1841, and, as such, is unlikely to have been a significant factor in determining responses to the Disruption.

### **Population Distribution.**

#### **Tain.**

As intimated earlier, there was a clear tripartite division in the population distribution of this parish. In 1836 1,725 people out of a parish total of 2,915 (59%) lived in the burgh.<sup>220</sup> By 1841 this percentage had increased slightly: 2,176 out of a total of 3,158 (68%). The recent changing pattern of agriculture, from a proliferation of smallholdings to a system of large farms,<sup>221</sup> may offer a possible explanation for an increasing proportion of folk living within the town.

Regarding the parish as a whole, the question of inward migration is addressed in the 1841 Population Census. Taking one central section of the burgh as an example, with a population of 525 individuals, approximately 23% had originated elsewhere, including a few from England and Ireland. This represents a fairly high percentage of inward migration, the occupations of the individuals concerned varying considerably and including burgh officer, farmer, land surveyor, weaver, army pensioner, tailor's apprentice, agricultural labourer and female servant. Such a picture increases the possibility of movement of ideas, including religious concepts and practices, and should receive consideration as possibly contributing towards reaction to the Disruption. Although only about 1% of Inver's population and 3% in a typical agricultural area were born outwith the parish,<sup>222</sup> this does not necessarily invalidate

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<sup>220</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.292.

<sup>221</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp. 4 and 12.

<sup>222</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Tain,

the conjectured effects of inward mobility, as it has been noted that no significant barriers to physical communication existed within the parish.

Inward mobility is also visible in the Old Parish Register. In 1835 seemingly 13 out of the 42 marriage partners (approximately 31%) came from outwith the parish, this number dropping to 10 out of 44 (about 23%) in 1839. The non-resident partners tended to come from nearby parishes, although some parish names were unfortunately indecipherable and consequently may have been further afield.<sup>223</sup> However, in the context of the spread of ideas and reinforcement of those already held, inter-parish mobility within a small geographical area, especially in an era of slow and limited facilities for travel, could have been of considerable significance.

The age profile in the 1841 Census reveals a fairly mature community within the burgh, as represented by the section investigated, and the selected agricultural district, 57% (51%) being adults of 20 years and above and 27% (28%) aged 40 and over. However, despite the stability of the community, Inver had a noticeably lower percentage of adults, the figures being 43% and 12% respectively (two thirds of the latter being women).<sup>224</sup> Such figures could reasonably be ascribed to the dangers of the fishing industry and the fairly recent outbreak of cholera. Taking this varying picture of age distribution into consideration, the possible role of maturity coupled with the 'pull' of the growing town should not be overlooked within the scope of this study.

### **Portree.**

It is valid to question whether the village of Portree could have occupied a similar role in its parish. However, the earlier described topography sheds doubt on this, physical impediments, particularly the sea in its unpredictable moods, providing notable communication barriers. The

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<sup>223</sup> Old Parish Register, Parish of Tain, 82/4.

<sup>224</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Tain.



geographical obstacles separated many of the widely scattered, tiny rural townships, whose exact location, nature and size varied across the area and through time, clearances having a noticeable effect. This shifting of tenantry was generally precipitated by economic problems leading to rent arrears, plus the need of proprietors to increase estate income. Years of crop failure aggravated the situation. References to the removal of tenants either for non-payment of rent or to bring in a more lucrative tenant, often to manage a sheep farm, can be found in the Lord Macdonald Papers, examples being the general estate papers for the years 1806 to 1817 and the 1807 petition of tenants from Peinchorran, Balmeanach and Gedintailor on mainland Skye against a single tenant taking over their lands.<sup>225</sup> Even when evicted tenants received alternative accommodation this tended to be in areas where the soil was either inferior or exhausted, leading to extreme overcrowding. For instance, in Peinchorran (presumably the above-mentioned petition was at least partially successful!) and Achnahanaid, two townships in the Braes district south of Portree, the increase in tenants created appalling misery.<sup>226</sup>

Although Raasay suffered more severely from clearances after the Disruption it did not escape entirely prior to the event. Macleod, at that time owner of Raasay and its associated islands (Lord Macdonald being the proprietor on Skye itself), carried out evictions in 1836 and between 1841 and 1843. Some of the more significant communities in the southern half of the island, including Castle and Upper Hallaig, were affected in the latter period.<sup>227</sup> Although a number of families were relocated in northern Raasay or on Rona, there was also a notable level of emigration. Before instigating a further brief consideration of the effects of pre-Disruption clearances in the parish it is apposite within the framework of this study to note

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<sup>225</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 3713 and 4257.

<sup>226</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.259.

<sup>227</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.192.

that the major post-Disruption clearances on Raasay were carried out by Mr. Rainy, a staunch supporter of the Free Church, who had purchased the islands from the bankrupt MacLeod in 1843.<sup>228</sup>

Exact figures for pre-Disruption emigration from the parish are difficult to pinpoint, as the sources tapped tend to omit parish of origin for emigrants sailing from Portree. However, Roderick Mackenzie claims that communities like Camustianavaig in the southern Braes district were so depleted by emigrations to Canada and Australia that by the 1830s there were insufficient 'hands left to haul the boats ashore.'<sup>229</sup> According to Cooper, by 1840 and 1841 emigration was increasing, 600 individuals having 'left for America and Australia from the parish of Portree alone.'<sup>230</sup> The population may have been increasing, but relocation and departure were beginning to hit the community.

At the time individuals like the parish minister, the Reverend Coll Macdonald, and other 'philanthropically-minded people' regarded emigration as the best solution for relieving the economic difficulties facing the 'poor and labouring classes.'<sup>231</sup> This attitude adopted by their minister may have been as significant an impetus for Portree parishioners to leave the Established Church as the clearances and emigration themselves – but the complexity of contributory factors will emerge as this study progresses. The clearances, however, could well have impacted on the sense of community and localised cultural identity within the various small townships involved, affecting both those removed and those remaining.

Portree, scarcely meriting the title of village at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was developed by Lord Macdonald as a planned settlement. In 1801 his surveyor sent plans of 'lots

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid. (1977), p.62.

<sup>229</sup> Mackenzie, Roderick (1977), p.2.

<sup>230</sup> Cooper, Derek (1970), p.53.

<sup>231</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.260.



to be laid out for settlers at Portree' to the Commissioners of the estate.<sup>232</sup> By 1841 there were 507 inhabitants,<sup>233</sup> about an eighth of the total parish population. Consequently Portree, in contrast to Tain, did not dominate its parish numerically. Nonetheless other communities were considerably smaller. Taking examples from the 1841 Census, Peinchorran and Scorrybreck had 102 inhabitants each and Gedintailor 74. On Raasay 36 folk lived in Torran and 55 in Kyle of Rona.

Regarding population mobility, nearly 16% of Portree village's 507 inhabitants had been born outside the county.<sup>234</sup> Although a slightly lower percentage than Tain it still represents a fair degree of inward migration, a partial explanation perhaps lying in its significance as a port on the run between Glasgow and the Western Isles. This feature would also facilitate the movement of ideas, both religious and secular. Again, the immigrant population displayed a wide range of occupations, including writer, schoolmaster, merchant, excise officer, baker, gardener, dressmaker and female servant.<sup>235</sup> However, such issues as geographical difficulties of communication may have limited the consequences of this mobility more than in Tain. As in the parts of Tain outwith the burgh little inward migration occurred in other townships, the total population of Peinchorran and Gedintailor, for example, having been born in the county and only three people in Kyle of Rona and one individual in Torran having been born elsewhere. Scorrybreck paints a different picture, since about 16% of its inhabitants came from outwith the county.<sup>236</sup> Proximity to Portree may provide a partial answer, but also the township had been recently cleared and turned into a sheep farm. Original tenants had been evicted with the consequent possibility of new labour being introduced.

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<sup>232</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 4180.

<sup>233</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

Further clues regarding inward mobility at a pan-parish level can be gleaned from the Old Parish Register. In 1835 4 out of the 32 marriage partners (approximately 12.5%) were from outwith the parish, rising to 7 out of 26 (about 27%) in 1839. Although in 1843 the relevant figures were 7 out of 50, a drop to 14% (interestingly there was a record number of marriages that year, the majority occurring before the Disruption), the percentage rose again in 1845 to 6 out of 32, approximately 19%. However, the orbit of matrimonial mobility is somewhat small, as in Tain, virtually all of the non-resident partners coming from parishes elsewhere on Skye.<sup>237</sup>

Attempts to correlate age profiles with possible community reactions to religious movements are fraught with difficulties due to interpretation problems and inconsistencies. Whilst about 58% of the inhabitants of Portree village were aged 20 or over, only about 18% were aged 40 and over in contrast with the 27% in Tain.<sup>238</sup> A shorter life expectancy or a greater influx of younger adults could furnish reasons. Additionally, the picture in other communities lacks consistency, Kyle of Rona having approximately 53% of its inhabitants over 20 and 31% over 40 and Torran and Scorrybreck, in contrast, having around 43% and 14% in the respective groups.<sup>239</sup>

### **Strath.**

Population distribution in Strath presents an even more complex picture. As indicated earlier, the inhabitants dwelt in tiny townships, scattered throughout the district, as in Portree, their exact location, nature and size varying across the area and through time. The introduction of the crofting system with individual lots (as opposed to the former run-rig pattern of cultivation with communal grazing areas), principally attendant upon eviction from traditionally held

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<sup>237</sup> Old Parish Register, Portree, 114/2.

<sup>238</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

<sup>239</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.



lands to create larger farms and sheep runs, initiated an ongoing redistribution of population. For example, in the 1830s western townships such as Keppoch in Strathaird, as well as Boreraig and Suisnish, were well populated, whereas by 1840, the 'Breakishes' in the east, formerly big farms, had begun to witness a division into crofts, their increased population pouring in from elsewhere.<sup>240</sup> Excerpts from the Parish Records confirm this trend. In 1823, for example, only one child from Breakish was baptised and Sculamus was not mentioned, whereas by 1832 the figures for Breakish and nearby Sculamus were 10 and 6 respectively.<sup>241</sup> Population redistribution also occurred among those parishioners who had become involved in the kelp industry. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when production was profitable, numerous families pursued a life of modest comfort along the shore. However, the price of Hebridean kelp dropped dramatically after the tax on imported barilla was repealed in 1825.<sup>242</sup> Consequently, these families, having neglected farming and fishing, lacked other means of support and were forced to leave their homes, often emigrating to the Colonies. Clearances and relocation thus did occur, although few specific details have been uncovered in the sources trawled for the pre-Disruption period. The inhabitants of five townships on the Mackinnon estate of Strathaird (the rest of the parish belonged to Lord Macdonald) were warned off the land when ownership passed to Alexander MacAlister of Skirmish in 1785-6. Nonetheless people still lived in these communities in the ensuing century, although gradually crofting tenants elsewhere on the estate were ousted from their homes.<sup>243</sup> In 1825 Kilbride farm suffered from evictions in order to provide a suitable-sized holding for the Reverend John MacKinnon, the incoming assistant minister.<sup>244</sup> It is significant that, despite clearances

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<sup>240</sup> Lamont, the Reverend D.(1984), p.124.

<sup>241</sup> Strath Parish Records.

<sup>242</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.258.

<sup>243</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), pp.21-22.

<sup>244</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1983), p.158.

across the parish, even undertaken to accommodate an Established Church cleric, nonetheless the majority of Strath's inhabitants remained within the Establishment, following the example of this cleric, who had by then succeeded his father as parish minister.

Regarding size and nature of Strath communities, by 1840 Kyleakin (a ferry point on the strait dividing Skye from the mainland) possessed a good inn and some shops, and Broadford, on the east coast, sported a satisfactory inn, two shops, a smithy and a mill. Acting also as a distribution point for mails, it witnessed three horse and cattle markets annually. Mackinnon suggests that by this date the community merited the designation of 'village.'<sup>245</sup> However, the 1841 Census indicates a population of only 209, less than half that of Portree. The nearby community of Harripool was in fact slightly larger, possessing 223 inhabitants, although Waterloo and Moorlands, in the same vicinity, only comprised 95 and 58 inhabitants respectively, demonstrating the considerable variety existing even in the more populous eastern section of the parish. Indeed, at this time, reasonably-sized townships still existed in the west, Suishnish and Boreraig having populations of 139 and 134 respectively and Elgol, the principal township on the Strathaird estate, possessing 237 inhabitants.<sup>246</sup> Consequently, although community size may well have had no specific effect on parish behaviour, function (in relation to Broadford) might have exerted some influence.

Inward migration, with its associated probability of movement of ideas, is relevant here also, approximately 24% of Broadford's population having been born outside the county,<sup>247</sup> a figure similar to that of Tain. Like Portree, being a port of call for steamers may offer a partial explanation for this statistic. A wide variety of occupations again characterised the immigrant population, including assistant schoolmaster, commercial traveller, merchant, mason, tailor,

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<sup>245</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), pp.175 and 182.

<sup>246</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Strath.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.



agricultural labourer and female servant.<sup>248</sup> The wide variation in type of occupation and inevitable socio-economic status would seemingly enable notions picked up elsewhere to reach a greater number of the indigenous population – a point equally relevant in Tain and Portree. The reception of religious ideals and movements, however, would appear to have differed between the parishes, considering their dissimilar Disruption responses. As in Tain and Portree, inward migration was scarce in other parts of the parish. In the townships recorded in the west all the inhabitants had been born in the county, and only Harripool in the east possessed any residents from elsewhere, the proportion being merely about 7%.<sup>249</sup> Although such figures do hide inter-parish mobility, it must be asked whether ‘immigrant’ individuals in Broadford and Harripool were just ‘passing through’ and also whether they had much impact on the cultural identity and belief systems of local folk.

The pattern of marriages disclosed in the Parish Records tends to show a steady increase of partners coming from outwith the parish. Allowing for a few illegible parish names it would appear that in 1835 11 out of 46 marriage partners (approximately 24%) were not native to the parish, the equivalent figures for 1840 and 1845 being 5 out of 18 (28%) and 8 out of 22 (36%). As in Portree, however, the other partners generally came from elsewhere in Skye,<sup>250</sup> again demonstrating a limited range of mobility at this stage in life.

Broadford’s age profile is fairly mature and remarkably similar to that of Portree, about 55% of inhabitants being aged 20 or over and 17% aged 40 and over, again a lower percentage in the latter age group compared with Tain. Other townships show varying profiles. Among those close to Broadford, Waterloo displays a similar profile, whereas Moorlands and Harripool

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Parish Records, Parish of Strath.

both have a greater percentage (26% and 25% respectively) in the higher age group.<sup>251</sup> This could reflect a transient young adult population in Broadford. In the west, although Elgol and Suishnish have a similar proportion of the higher age group to Broadford, their adult population is generally smaller.<sup>252</sup> This may be attributable to a need for adults, particularly those in the younger age group, to seek employment in other parts of the country. Although lack of figures cannot be interpreted as positive evidence, this possible outward migration could also have furnished a source of exchange of ideas. It may be relevant at this juncture to observe that the Free Church first gained a foothold in the late 1840s in this part of the parish.

### Summary.

Clearances creating emigration or a redistribution of population have been seen to affect the rural parishes of Portree and Strath. Lack of located references to such an issue in relation to Tain does not offer conclusive proof that the development of larger farms in the countryside surrounding the burgh did not similarly stimulate some emigration. However, the increase in the burgh's population and the likely interdependence of town and its immediate agricultural hinterland would suggest that local relocation was more likely. Agricultural workers resided within the burgh and may well have combined such work with other employment.

The geographical context of the parishes, their population sizes and the distribution of communities, either static or changing, have furnished a broad framework for the lives of the inhabitants. Before investigating the occupational profiles of the three parishes, an impression of which has been gained from this foregoing analysis, it is appropriate to examine the question of communications. This topic has implications for population distribution, particularly population mobility, and movement of ideas as well as forming a backdrop to the occupational profiles.

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<sup>251</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Strath.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.



## Communications.

### **Tain.**

Although Tain lacked a harbour, the NSA claims the town was 'well supplied in all directions with public roads.' In 1837, two daily mail coaches plied between Tain and Inverness, with a link north to the Meikle Ferry on the Dornoch Firth, and a daily mail gig headed north to Bonar. Improved road communications had been continuing since the early years of the century, aiding not only the carriage of goods, but also 'social intercourse,' and helping to obviate any seeming disadvantages of Tain's location within the country.<sup>253</sup>

Tain Council assumed notable responsibility in this quarter, contributing, for example, to the maintenance of the mail coach service, threatened with withdrawal in June 1821 due to lack of financial support from the county.<sup>254</sup> In 1836 it appointed a carrier for free delivery of letters in the town<sup>255</sup> and outwith the town support is noted, for instance, in 1834 for a privately started omnibus service between Tain, Invergordon and Inverness.<sup>256</sup> It should be acknowledged that several councillors would have also been prominent in the church!

Problems of sea communications, although perhaps inhibiting personal travel to a certain extent, probably constituted a greater inconvenience for goods. Despite Tain's inability to have a harbour, as intimated earlier,<sup>257</sup> improved road transport from nearby Invergordon assisted shipping contact with the south. A vessel sailed fortnightly from Invergordon to London around 1840, another sailing at the same intervals through the summer to Inverness, Aberdeen and Leith, while a third followed the latter route weekly.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.296; Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), pp.81-82; Mitchell, Joseph (1971), p.258.

<sup>254</sup> Council Book of Tain, B70/6/2, pp.96-97.

<sup>255</sup> Council Book of Tain, B70/6/3, no page number.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, B70/6/3, p.157.

<sup>257</sup> Anderson, George and Peter (1834), pp.505-506.

<sup>258</sup> Robertson, Allan G.R. (n.d. but post-1967), p.107.

These constantly improving physical communication facilities would have undoubtedly assisted in opening up Tain, particularly the burgh, to external influences, including religious movements, attitudes and dissensions. However, despite the relatively compact nature of the parish, the inhabitants of Inver and the poorer folk in the country may well have experienced a more limited and localised forum for social and ideological interchange.

### **The Skye Parishes.**

The communications picture in these parishes was somewhat different. Although notable similarities existed between Portree and Strath, some specific references will be investigated. The period being studied witnessed gradual developments in road and sea communications, slowly bringing increasing benefit to some inhabitants in terms of transporting goods, news and persons, although the poorest parishioners and those in remote areas may well have remained unaffected. Even in 1832, however, limitations of accessibility are highlighted by an Inverness Courier report regretting the inability to 'forward a copy of the Reform Act to our correspondent in Skye for some weeks, till a carrier leaves Inverness.'<sup>259</sup> Additionally, although the sources reveal road development, it can only be conjectured how individuals moved from one place to another. Visitors would have possessed the financial means to journey in more comfort than the average parishioner, the Reverend Charles Lesingham Smith, for example, being conveyed by cart to the inn at Sligachan in 1835.<sup>260</sup>

### **Portree.**

Between 1805 and 1815 roads were being improved, particularly between Sconser and Portree, although half finished sections still hindered communication.<sup>261</sup> However, by 1841 the minister was able to affirm that 'the greatest change has been produced by the Parliamentary

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<sup>259</sup> Barron, James (1907), p.29.

<sup>260</sup> Cooper, Derek (1979), p.67.

<sup>261</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 904, 1142, 1346 and 1615.



and other district roads throughout the parish.<sup>262</sup> Such advances undoubtedly eased postal communications, which had already commenced by the time of the OSA.<sup>263</sup> However, although postal services to Raasay started in 1839,<sup>264</sup> no reference has been unearthed regarding any road construction. Although absence of information should not be taken as conclusive, nonetheless it tends to underline the impression of an isolated part of the parish.

Journeying by sea was probably more significant. Most parishioners would tend to travel, when necessary, either in their own small boats or those of neighbours or official boatmen. Additionally, steamers had begun to serve Skye. The first of numerous references appears in a guide-book published in 1820.<sup>265</sup> A letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1831 notes that the Maid of Islay 'has commenced her Summer trips,' passengers leaving Portree on Monday morning' being 'landed in Glasgow on Tuesday night at 9 o'clock.'<sup>266</sup> This undoubtedly assisted external communication and encouraged travellers to visit the area. Although the early visitors were generally serious minded, such as geologists and amateur naturalists, nonetheless they constituted an introduction to the tastes and views of the 'outside world.' Although these travellers principally communicated with parishioners of higher status, they also encountered those of more 'lowly station.'

Regarding communication between tenants and landlords, information is limited. During the period being studied there were two proprietors or heritors, as intimated earlier. MacLeod of Raasay generally lived on his estate, whereas Lord Macdonald, although owning Armadale Castle in Sleat, was primarily an absentee landlord. A seeming desire to ape the style of life of southern aristocracy, impossible to support through tenant rentals on the poor land of Skye, led

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<sup>262</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.235.

<sup>263</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), p.159.

<sup>264</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.189.

<sup>265</sup> Cooper, Derek (1979), p.58.

<sup>266</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 1801/10.

these proprietors to seek higher returns from more substantial tenants, principally engaged in sheep farming. The effect on their original tenants was devastating, as episodes of clearances illustrate, but their own failure is witnessed in the passing of the Macdonald estates into the hands of trustees and the sale of the MacLeod lands to an Edinburgh businessman.

These proprietorial changes coupled with the tenurial insecurity had seriously weakened ties between the landlords and their tenants by 1843. Improving physical communications would permit them access to external figures, whose ideological influences could offer possibilities of assuaging the anxieties created by their changing socio-cultural environment, as later material will highlight.

### **Strath.**

The situation in Strath, as suggested above, would have borne several similarities with that of its northern neighbour. Travel within the parish was extremely hazardous in the early nineteenth century. Nicolson maintains that the first road on the island, heading north from Kyle Rhea and passing through Broadford, was only surveyed in 1799 and not completed before 1820.<sup>267</sup> Indeed, it was only the co-operation between Government and local proprietors, leading to the construction of Parliamentary Roads, that enabled the NSA to report that thirty miles of such roads and ten of statute labour existed in the parish,<sup>268</sup> thus facilitating movement of news, goods and people.

Although the receipt of publicly reported news in the pre-Disruption period is undisclosed in the sources consulted, the facilitation of mail carriage is recorded. This would probably have conveyed general as well as personal news to literate parishioners. By the 1830s and early 1840s mail communication with the mainland occurred thrice weekly at the 'post-town' of

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<sup>267</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.210.

<sup>268</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.311.



Broadford,<sup>269</sup> its speed of passage recently increased.<sup>270</sup> Despite opportunities to learn about occurrences and debates in the outside world becoming available, evidence is lacking as to their efficiency or impact, the total cultural environment of parishioners undoubtedly contributing to any reactions.

However, as in Portree, sea communication remained more significant prior to 1843. As MacCulloch remarked in the early nineteenth century: 'Boats are the stage coaches and the post-chaises of the country.'<sup>271</sup> Piers built at Broadford in 1807<sup>272</sup> and at Kyleakin some time prior to 1800,<sup>273</sup> facilitated shipping movement. Kyleakin was the main crossing-point to the island (except for cattle),<sup>274</sup> a cargo service between there and Glasgow starting in the winter of 1820-21<sup>275</sup> and a passenger service existing by the 1830s.<sup>276</sup> Although discrepancies exist in the sources regarding sail or steamboat and length of voyage, a gradual improvement in sea communication was witnessed during the pre-Disruption period, again assisting the passage of news and persons as well as goods, thus making the 'parish more accessible to the outside world.'<sup>277</sup>

It is, however, difficult to estimate the extent to which news would have spread through Strath. Indeed, three current parishioners, whose families have long associations with the parish, furnished, in interview, differing views on the subject. The current Church of Scotland elder, Peter Fulton, contended that townships in the pre-Disruption period were quite separate entities, implying little inter-community intercourse, whereas the local historian, Neil MacKinnon, considers that such limitations were only encountered outwith parish bounds,

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p.311.

<sup>270</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.182.

<sup>271</sup> MacCulloch, John (1824), Volume III, p.405.

<sup>272</sup> Barron, James (1903), p.8.

<sup>273</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 649.

<sup>274</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), p.30.

<sup>275</sup> Barron, James (1903), pp.189-190.

<sup>276</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.311.

<sup>277</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.197.

inhabitants of the parish being linked by similar interests and cut off from the north by mountains and from Sleat by moorland. However, another elder, Catriona Maclean, asserted that notable communication with other parishes existed in the form of, for example, movements of servant girls or court attendance in Portree, people thus being well aware of events occurring elsewhere on the island. Certainly the distinctive identity of individual townships could affect reactions on a very localised scale, but enforced movement of families across the parish, as noted earlier, would have created changing cultural identities and a diminution of specific community differences. Additionally, movement in search of work was not limited to an inter-parish level, migration to the mainland also being involved.

### **Summary**

In Strath relationships with proprietors and tenurial insecurity reveal a similarity to that accruing in Portree. It was a period of change within rural localities, incorporating a continuing loosening of traditional ties between the people and their superiors and a gradual increase of accessibility to ideas and individuals from the outside world. Exactly how the various small communities in the Skye parishes reacted is difficult to determine, beyond the broad pattern of general behaviour at the Disruption. However, as ensuing material will suggest, many factors in their daily lives were at work, interacting in complex patterns to produce behaviour that appeared ostensibly homogeneous but was actually promoted by unique blends of these elements. This observation is equally valid in Tain, where, despite differential experiences across the parish, a seemingly unequivocal and unitary decision occurred in 1843, a decision again reflecting a complexity of contributory factors.



### **Occupational Profiles.**

#### **Tain.**

The burgh of Tain has been seen to exercise a 'pull' in terms of numerical standing within its parish. The spread of occupations within its bounds and the attendant functions these imply provide an indication of its nature. Shand's survey of 1834 is well able to illustrate this point. The relatively significant administrative function of Tain is reflected in the existence of such men as a Sheriff Substitute, Sheriff Clerk, seven Sheriff Officers, a retired Burgh Officer and a Baillie. The town also supported a group of professional men, including seven writers, two doctors, two surgeons, five teachers and a banker. Trade and commerce were well established, twenty-five merchants, a grocer, flesher, auctioneer, cattle dealer, three excisemen, four carriers and an innkeeper all being recorded. The already growing impression of a fairly prosperous little burgh is finally heightened by an examination of the variety of resident artisans. These include the more prestigious occupations of coppersmith, goldsmith, perfumer, watchmaker and book-binder, as well as the more basic skills, such as those of shoemaker (twenty-two altogether!), wright, mason, carpenter, tailor, weaver, baker and brewer. Ancillary services, such as messenger, road inspector and scavenger, are also represented, as well as offices associated with the church; catechist, precentor, church officer and, of course, minister.<sup>278</sup> The 1841 Population Census tends to endorse this picture of a fairly self-sufficient community living at a reasonable level of material comfort. An accountant and bank agent, for example, can be added to the list of professionals, more publicans appear and apprentices to a variety of trades abound. As in the 1834 report, resident army pensioners feature and farmers

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<sup>278</sup> Shand, James (1834).

and agricultural labourers figure quite prominently,<sup>279</sup> reflecting a persistent medieval concept of the interdependence of a burgh with its immediate rural hinterland.

Regarding this rural hinterland, the interdependence can be illustrated by examining, for example, the 1841 Census returns for Enumeration Districts 1 and 2. Although in both cases farmers and agricultural labourers constitute the highest proportion of the working population, a variety of other occupations are also represented, including catechist, schoolteacher, clerk, shoemakers, brewer, plasterer, sawyer and boat-builder.<sup>280</sup>

Tain was not an industrial centre. The New Statistical Account underlines this, mentioning only the quarrying of sandstone on the Hill of Tain, an iron foundry and a brewery, both merely producing for local consumption, and sawing, carding, grinding and dyeing mills near the outskirts of the town.<sup>281</sup> Individuals working in these small industries appeared in the statistics, but were numerically a very small proportion of the total population. Thus Tain emerges as primarily an administrative and commercial centre, the significance of its former role exceeding that of its size, major church and civil courts meeting within its confines as well as its town council, whose members included local landowners, professional men and merchants.<sup>282</sup> The Council Book of Tain reveals the wide range of business it conducted, including the election of a representative to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, allocating the division of seats in the new church, discussing a proposal for a medical dispensary for the poor and debating support for local private schools.<sup>283</sup> Interestingly, the Provost signed the Act of Demission on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1843, aligning himself with the new Free Church, in company with the rest of the Established Church elders.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Tain.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.293 -295.

<sup>282</sup> Mowat, Ian (1981), p.65.

<sup>283</sup> Council Book of Tain, B70/6/2, pp. 45, 125 -132 and 351; B70/6/4, eg. pp.239 and 260.

<sup>284</sup> Tain Free Church Session Book, C113/748/1.



Although Tain was indeed a commercial centre, it merely served the surrounding district and sections of Sutherland. The lack of a harbour restricted longer-distance trade, which required to be conducted through Invergordon or Cromarty, distances of about eleven miles. Nevertheless, Tain possessed some prestige, presumably principally through the administrative functions outlined above and its status as a Royal Burgh. This prestige is highlighted in the identities of those elected to the office of Provost. Sir Charles Ross of Balnagown (who owned some property within the burgh) was, for example, elected in 1807 and the Right Honourable William Dundas, MP and then Lord Register of Scotland, assumed the office in 1820, 1826 and 1827.<sup>285</sup>

Despite possessing prestige and conveying an aura of supporting a relatively satisfactory level of material existence, Tain still harboured poverty. The New Statistical Account affirms that about 145 folk received 'parochial aid,'<sup>286</sup> although the number of paupers was recognised to be double the number actually claiming relief. The Kirk Session's refusal of aid from its scanty funds to 'importunate applicants,' plus a 'species of pride' or commiseration for those worse off are all seen as reasons for many of the poor resorting to 'mendicancy,' assistance being offered by kindly and 'respectable' folk of the neighbourhood.<sup>287</sup> Additionally there were formal private charities, the Guildry Society of Tain, for example, caring chiefly for widows.<sup>288</sup>

Regarding agriculture, The New Statistical Account records recent rapid advances. Wheat, generally confined to the large farms up till ten years previously, was being grown even by cottars. Various estates had reclaimed waste land, drained, fenced and planted. Townsmen, as suggested above, were heavily involved, cultivating fields around the town, generally on

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<sup>285</sup> Barron, James (1903), pp.6 and 188; (1907), pp.24 and 37.

<sup>286</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.299.

<sup>287</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), p.17.

<sup>288</sup> Mowat, Ian (1981), p.109.

annual or short leases, although nineteen year leases were common in the district generally,<sup>289</sup> a situation more usual in the Lowlands than in the Highlands at that period. Cameron, reporting at a similar time (1841), observes that the pattern of agriculture had undergone change, from one of small holdings to a system of large farms.<sup>290</sup> No mention is made of reactions by the former tenants of the small farms! Although there is no concrete evidence of large-scale clearances in this period, obviously some removals did take place. A majority of country folk (and some living in the town, as noted earlier) earned their living by field-labour. Crofters, tenants-at-will, subsisted precariously on very small parcels of land, cottars lacking even their rights. Farm-servants, such as grieve, ploughman, cattleman, herd-boys and female servants, led reasonably comfortable lives, whereas day-labourers undertaking specific tasks such as weeding, reaping or trenching, digging drains or mending fences, were less secure, due to the 'uncertainty and fluctuations of their employment.'<sup>291</sup> The inference from these bald statements is that relative comfort was enjoyed by some and intermittent or constant hardship by others.

Artisans also lived in the country, as recorded earlier, their status and consequent standard of living varying between the trades, masons and house-carpenters, for example, seemingly enjoying more favour than tailors and weavers. For the fishermen of Inver, the profits of the herring season were their chief means of subsistence, supplemented by occasional fishing at other times and the cultivation of potatoes, for sale as well as consumption.<sup>292</sup> Such facts suggest a precarious existence.

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<sup>289</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.293 -295.

<sup>290</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), p.12.

<sup>291</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp.13-14.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.



### **The Skye Parishes.**

Thus, although contrasts in comfort, occupation and status certainly existed within the parish of Tain, most inhabitants had at least a fairly adequate standard of life. However, for the majority of the inhabitants of Portree and Strath, subsistence and an insecure, fickle existence was the norm. Land was poor and unimproved by major landowners. The other major source of income for the parishioners, fishing, was not only treacherous, as on the east coast, but also unreliable. Only the tacksmen and larger tenants, plus the few professional men or merchants, principally located in the village of Portree, would have benefited from relative material comfort.

### **Portree.**

Statistics again provide a useful occupational profile and are taken from the 1841 Census. The village of Portree provided certain amenities, although rudimentary in comparison with those of Tain. The only hint of any administrative function lies in the existence of the Inspector of Rural Police, the Messenger at Arms and the Postmaster.<sup>293</sup> Although a courthouse existed in Portree, the Sheriff or his representative must have travelled from elsewhere (in about 1826, Mr. Mackinnon of Corry in Strath, although not a lawyer, was Sheriff of Skye).<sup>294</sup> Professional functions were limited in scope, there being five writers, two bankers, a schoolmaster and a clergyman (not the Established Church minister, who appears to have lived outside the confines of the village), as well as auxiliary assistance afforded by five clerks and the invaluable aid proffered by the midwife.<sup>295</sup> The existence of a Procurator Fiscal in Portree is evidenced by his extant papers, but he may have been included among the 'writers' by the Census enumerator.

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<sup>293</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

<sup>294</sup> Mitchell, Joseph (1971), p.128.

<sup>295</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

Portree appears to have supported a reasonable amount of trade, ten merchants, two shopkeepers (the difference between the two remains unspecified) and two innkeepers residing there, as well as an excise officer.<sup>296</sup> As the village has been noted to constitute the most substantial settlement on the island, with road and sea communication available, it is understandable that commercial functions should have been concentrated there. Lack of evidence for any such activity on Raasay cannot be taken as conclusive of its absence, but the very scattered nature and small size of its townships would suggest that it, too, relied on Portree for this function.

The variety of artisans is surprisingly great, although again probably reflecting Portree's situation on the island. Shoemakers proliferate, being seven in number, while other skills include tailors, mantuamakers, hand loom weavers, lace makers, house carpenters, masons, bakers, saddler, smith and watchmaker.<sup>297</sup> The existence of artisans producing luxury goods would tend to suggest that those of social standing on the island may well have ordered goods locally. Portree's possession of a good harbour undoubtedly lies behind the existence of fishermen and mariners in the village, and the interdependence of a concentrated community and its rural surroundings is underlined by the presence of sixteen agricultural labourers. Additionally, it is probable that other villagers would work patches of land, as few of the noted occupations would have been likely to provide full-time employment. Multiple occupations, indeed, would undoubtedly have been a common feature across the parish and across the full spectrum of society, professional men leasing farms, such as the doctor bidding for the lease

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.



of Drumuie farm in 1805,<sup>298</sup> and crofters throughout Skye manufacturing their own harness, fishing nets, shoes and clothing.<sup>299</sup>

Outwith the village, agricultural labourers, not surprisingly, tended to predominate. In the northern township of Scurrybreck, for example, fifteen men in the seventeen households were agricultural labourers and twelve out of seventeen households in Peinchorran, near the southern tip of the parish, were headed by them. On Raasay such men were sometimes termed tenants by the enumerator, four of Torran's six households having a tenant as their head and six agricultural labourers and one farmer living in the township of Kyle of Rona, which comprised eleven households. Few other occupations are recorded in the townships, female servants, hand loom weavers and male servants being the most common,<sup>300</sup> although such trades as tailor, joiner and smith do appear.<sup>301</sup>

The poverty of these townships is highlighted by the mention of paupers, Kyle of Rona on Raasay having six among its fifty-five inhabitants.<sup>302</sup> The maintenance of such disadvantaged folk must have been onerous. The level of church funds available would have been minimal, due to widespread subsistence living, and occasional legacies, such as that recorded 'from a native of the parish' in April, 1818,<sup>303</sup> would have merely scratched the surface of the problem. In comparison with Tain, where destitution would have been less and ability to support greater, Portree could be expected to have witnessed a greater struggle in this respect – although this makes no allowance for willingness among friends, relatives and neighbours to assist, a characteristic which will be investigated later in this study.

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<sup>298</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 923.

<sup>299</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.268.

<sup>300</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

<sup>301</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.211.

<sup>302</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Portree.

<sup>303</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 1718.

As intimated earlier, the majority of parishioners were involved in agriculture, either exclusively or alongside other occupations, such as fishing, *artisanal* work or even professional jobs. The runrig system was abandoned on the Macdonald estates in 1811, Sharpe conjecturing that this may have occurred on Raasay at about the same time.<sup>304</sup> The lotting system and associated redirection of population to poorer ground, principally, as indicated earlier, to increase proprietorial income by developing more sizeable sheep farms, rendered the majority of inhabitants more vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather. The indisputable inadequacy of some of the lots was observed in 1841 at the north end of Raasay, 'small green patches' being discerned, 'varying from the size of an ordinary grave to that of a large dining-room carpet.'<sup>305</sup> Although this was an area of particularly poor soil and topographical conditions, the situation was probably little better in other parts of the parish.

The minister, in 1841, affirms that black cattle constituted the greatest source of revenue, although prices and demand were unpredictable and most tenants possessed too few to gain much financial benefit. Macdonald also regards the mode of tenure, comprising commonly held grazing land owned by one landlord, as injurious to the best interests of the tenants, their 'small patches' of arable land being of even less value to them, confirming the view expressed above. The majority of parishioners employed old-fashioned methods of husbandry, their poverty also being an impediment to progress and improvements.<sup>306</sup> Reliance on such limited food stores increased their vulnerability, as the potato blight of the years following 1845 so dramatically and drastically proved. Although a majority of the population had a generalised involvement in cultivation and stock-rearing, a few had specialised roles. Shepherds existed and there was also the '*àireach*' or cattleman, who cared for the beasts in the hilly winter and

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<sup>304</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), pp.59 -60.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>306</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.226-230.



spring grazings.<sup>307</sup> Such men led lonely lives and probably struggled to feel part of a community.

The picture painted above in relation to agricultural resources is one of a struggling tenantry and of land managed for the benefit of the few rather than the livelihood of many. This situation seems to be in notable contrast to that appertaining in the parish of Tain, and is likely to have had a significant impact on their general attitudes and belief systems. The fact that the other available major resource, fishing, was also unreliable and required more capital outlay than most could afford, merely underlines this impression. Nevertheless, a majority pursued this occupation. Portree's location close to the best grounds for herring-fishing and the men of Raasay's skills as 'excellent fishers and excellent seamen' could have been expected to produce more satisfactory returns. Unfortunately, the poor price obtained for fish, due to the 'great difficulty of procuring salt' and the exorbitant prices charged for that commodity, meant that the industry failed to be as beneficial to the local economy as it might have been.<sup>308</sup> The problem intensified during the early decades of the nineteenth century due to a decline in fishing, a situation which Macdonald identifies as a causal factor in the years of severe destitution in the mid 1830s. Freshwater fish were generally unable to alleviate matters as fishing rights tended to be restricted to privileged members of the community.<sup>309</sup>

Other resources included the kelp, mentioned earlier, its decline creating severe destitution among the local tenantry. Industrial resources, in terms of workable stone and minerals, were minimal in the parish and unlikely to have provided full-time work for many inhabitants. Indeed, Lord Macdonald used colliers from the South rather than local labour to work coal

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<sup>307</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp. 257 and 214.

<sup>308</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), pp.150, 158 and 161-162.

<sup>309</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.221, 223 and 230.

seams at Braes and at Camusbàn in Portree Loch,<sup>310</sup> and even these seams had been abandoned by 1841, being unprofitable to work. The one seemingly profitable resource, which would have supported some employment, was the granite, found in different locations in the parish, but especially on Raasay.<sup>311</sup> This island supplied Skye and adjacent mainland areas with its mill-stones, masons forming and dressing the blocks of stone.<sup>312</sup>

### **Strath.**

As intimated earlier, the occupational structure in Strath was little different from that in Portree, the principal exception being that it lacked a significant nuclear settlement. Much information relating to agriculture, fishing and kelp in the parish of Portree holds true for Strath, although some sources specific to this parish will be briefly explored.

Statistics taken from the 1841 Census will be utilised first to provide some clues about occupational framework. It has been mentioned earlier that relocation of tenants from west to east of the district occurred during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Four of these eastern townships were studied and provide interesting profiles. Only one, Waterloo, displays a predominance of agricultural labourers, thirteen in fourteen households. In Moorlands, a small community of twelve households, there were only three agricultural labourers, a shoemaker, tailor and two handloom weavers being among the other residents. However, more significantly, the two larger townships, Harripool (46 households) and Broadford (37 households), contained only 19 and 22 workers designated as agricultural labourers, with 58 and 79 individuals respectively enumerated as pursuing other occupations.<sup>313</sup> Although they are likely to have also undertaken agricultural work of some nature, seemingly the functions concentrated on Portree had been distributed among different Strath townships, these

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<sup>310</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.267.

<sup>311</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.221-222.

<sup>312</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.268.

<sup>313</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Strath.



townships aiming to be fairly self-sufficient and perhaps serving the needs of nearby communities. In Harripool there was an individual holding an administrative post, a Sheriff Officer, in Broadford there were three modest professionals, two schoolmasters and a preacher, and in both Harripool and Broadford there were signs of commercial activity. In the former, two merchants and an excise officer were recorded and in the latter, the venue for regular cattle fairs, two merchants, two commercial travellers, an excise officer and a housekeeper at the inn.<sup>314</sup> It is valid also to observe that the existence of literate men in these communities could have assisted the spread of ideas reaching the area in written form. Artisans were well represented, shoemakers, blacksmiths, spinsters, handloom weaver, tailor, carpenter, cooper and mason being included. Fishermen, sailors and millers are among other occupations noted in these townships. Finally, numerous female and male servants are recorded,<sup>315</sup> although it is unclear whether they were employed on a domestic or agricultural basis.

Three townships in the west of the parish were investigated, the comparatively sizeable community of Elgol in the Strathaird district, and Boreraig and Suishnish. The predominant occupation in all three townships was that of agricultural labourer, although male and female servants, handloom weavers, a sailor, carpenter, mason and tailor were also recorded. Additionally, a teacher was enumerated at Suishnish<sup>316</sup> (although he may have been a temporary resident, as the later section on education will reveal). Distance from the more populous area in the east may well have created the need for some men with specific skills, although throughout the parish other tasks required for providing the necessities of life would

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> 1841 Census, Parish of Strath.

probably have been undertaken by the individual families, as suggested earlier in relation to Portree.

The subsistence farming of Portree parish was replicated in Strath, insecurity of tenure and unpredictability of crops being the norm. The famine years of 1836 and 1837 hit hard, their minister referring to the alarming destitution caused by the failure of crops in general and the potato in particular, a 'fearful loss of life' only being prevented by philanthropic and charitable works.<sup>317</sup> Crofters' allotments being too small to introduce crop rotation, land was depleted of nutrients and forced to lie fallow for up to five years, causing untold hardship. Cottars, occupying sub-divisions of already diminutive portions of land, were in an even worse position and landless 'scallaigs,' undertaking menial tasks for tacksmen, led a precarious existence.<sup>318</sup> The parish minister informed Robert Somers, visiting in 1848, that 800 landless cottars lived in Strath, Somers also learning that crofters held no leases from Lord Macdonald, so lacked rights, as well as incentive to improve.<sup>319</sup> Declining prices for the staple commodity, black cattle, and the increasing importance of sheep as opposed to humans also assisted in creating the same havoc in Strath as in Portree.

Despite gradual changes in land tenure and holdings, neighbourly assistance continued after the practice of 'lotting' was introduced, help with various agricultural operations and the sharing or lending of horses and tools being common.<sup>320</sup> This would have furnished a reasonably strong focus for a sense of occupational cultural identity, also experienced in relation to the increasingly insignificant ancillary industries of kelp and fishing.

As in Portree, other industries were scarce in this essentially rural parish and would have affected only a small minority of the community, much so-called industry being carried out in

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<sup>317</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.314.

<sup>318</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.266.

<sup>319</sup> Somers, Robert (1985 [1848]), Letter XX, pp.97-99.

<sup>320</sup> Mackinnon, Neil (1979), p.28.



the home. Looms and spinning wheels were ubiquitous, the Andersons, writing in 1834, being highly impressed by the industriousness of the peasant women in spinning, 'whether walking or seated by their hearths, or at their cottage doors.'<sup>321</sup> The freestone and marble resources and Broadford's lime-kiln, seemingly very successful, would have given employment to only a very small proportion of parishioners.

Allusion has already been made to the limited level of commerce. Additionally, three inns are mentioned briefly in the New Statistical Account, as well as the importing of goods by 'vagrants' in the 1830s. The minister deplores these 'gipsies, ragmen, venders of crockery, tinsmiths, egg-dealers, and old-clothes men,' accusing them of introducing bad habits such as 'tea-drinking, tobacco-chewing and smoking.'<sup>322</sup> This is merely one viewpoint, but it does indicate that trade and consequent spread of ideas occurred at a 'low' level. Spread of ideas, as mentioned earlier, could have attended the exodus of young men and women seeking employment on the mainland, especially the Lowlands, to help support their families.<sup>323</sup>

A few individuals occupied posts as estate workers, as occurred also in Portree, and there was also a surgeon in Kyleakin in 1832.<sup>324</sup> However, professional men were thin on the ground, only one doctor, for example, in mid-century covering the whole of Strath and the neighbouring parish of Sleat.<sup>325</sup> The implications of this circumstance, coupled with the precarious existence affecting most of the populace, are obvious in terms of incidence of disease and high mortality rates. The effect on their attitudes to belief systems should be acknowledged.

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<sup>321</sup> Anderson, George and Peter (1834), p.476.

<sup>322</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.310-311 and 313.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

<sup>324</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 4298.

<sup>325</sup> Barron, Hugh, ed. (1985), p. 541.

### **Summary.**

The socio-economic status engendered by occupation and the occupational structure itself, together with levels of tenurial security and reliability of income, contextualise and give meaning to the varying domestic environments experienced by inhabitants of the three parishes. The domestic milieu will now be explored, an attempt being made to discern possible effects of material surroundings on parishioners.

### **Housing.**

#### **Tain.**

Regarding housing, the immediate physical environment for family life, a Report on the Burgh of Tain (1832) maintains that it could be regarded as thriving due to recent improvements, much ground having been feud and 'many new Houses' built.<sup>326</sup> However, across the parish there would have been few very substantial properties. The New Statistical Account, penned in 1837, states that twelve landowners possessed property exceeding L.50 in yearly value, only two of them residing there permanently, Malcolm Fraser of North Glastullich and George Ross of Moorfarm.<sup>327</sup> Nonetheless, Cameron affirms that several families in the town itself were in 'good circumstances' and a 'considerable proportion of the population' consisted of 'respectable individuals in the middle rank of life.' More than 72 shopkeepers, for example, possessing large establishments, could by no means be 'reckoned among the poorer orders.' The numerous artisans dwelt in houses similar in standard to those of farm-servants, comprising two rooms and a closet, some of which, particularly the dwellings occupied by masons and house-carpenters, were 'better finished and better furnished.'<sup>328</sup> Such comments

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<sup>326</sup> Dornoch and Tain – The Reform Act Plan of 1832 with Descriptive Text.

<sup>327</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.292-293.

<sup>328</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp.5-6 and 16.



are suggestive of a community in which, for many, the physical struggles of life were not paramount.

However, the houses of the 'labouring classes' presented a shocking contrast. Thatched with straw, 'seldom water-tight,' they usually comprised two apartments, although the poorest dwellings merely possessed one. Ventilation was poor, ill-framed chimneys created smoke and filth, floors were of clay or a mixture of earth and clay and refuse lying round the houses combined with 'very defective drainage' to create dampness in the properties.<sup>329</sup> The external environment was also unquestionably unhygienic, even the more prosperous members of the community experiencing both mud and filth on the streets from frequently inadequate gutters or overflowing burns as well as inferior quality water from draw-wells. The Council attempted to address these problems, giving attention, for example, to the necessity of cleaning the ordure-filled streets on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1837 and debating the ongoing difficulties of procuring a satisfactory water supply on numerous occasions from 10<sup>th</sup> September 1834 onwards.<sup>330</sup> The effect of such an environment on attitudes, beliefs and morals across the spectrum of the community can only be surmised without recourse to other contributory factors.

Cameron's description of the housing occupied by country dwellers includes Tain parish within its wider remit. He considers their homes, and also their persons, to increasingly reflect 'habits of neatness, order, and taste.' However, although dunghills and cesspools were now rarely present in front of the houses and cattle were no longer housed with the family, ventilation remained poor, resulting in an inevitable predisposition to the development and spread of disease, a handicap equally prevalent in the town.<sup>331</sup> The high incidence of disease

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>330</sup> Council Book of Tain, B70/6/3 and B70/6/3, p.179.

<sup>331</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), p.3.

and accompanying low level of life expectancy would undoubtedly have affected attitudes to life in general as well as beliefs and habits, both secular and religious.

Married farm servants lived in the cottages referred to above, whereas the unmarried folk occupied 'barrack-like buildings called "bothies."' Nonetheless, both categories of individuals experienced a certain level of comfort, whereas the poorer crofters, whose living was precarious, inhabited turf cabins.

The Inver fishermen experienced still rougher conditions. Although Cameron discerned a considerable improvement from the former 'miserable cabins,' 'receptacles of filth and nauseating effluvia,' many dwellings were still 'mere hovels,' facilities for admitting fresh air and light being minimal. Even the most respectable houses possessed 'heaps of stinking garbage' in their 'immediate vicinity,' which was mixed with 'various sorts of filth' – a recipe for the existence of poor health and the spread of disease.<sup>332</sup> The drastic effects of the outbreak of cholera in the village in the early 1830s seem hardly surprising in the light of these comments.

### **Portree.**

The vast majority of information gleaned about local dwellings resides in the external perspective of visitors to the region, whose origins in very different environments from the Hebrides indubitably colour their descriptions.

An enormous gulf separated the housing of the rich from that of the poor, reflecting a system which few travellers coming to the Hebrides would have considered questioning.<sup>333</sup> John MacCulloch, writing in 1819, regarded the dwellings he saw on the cliffs of the east coast of Raasay as 'more like the retreats of the birds.....than the habitations of human beings.'<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., pp.13, 18 and 15.

<sup>333</sup> Cooper, Derek (1979), p.4.

<sup>334</sup> MacCulloch, John (1819), p.241.



James Wilson, visiting in 1841, remarked on the few 'huts' barely 'discernible among the crags' of Umachan and Kyle Rona in northern Raasay. Travelling further south on Raasay he came to Brochel, whose habitations he described as 'wretched.'<sup>335</sup> The picture portrayed, equally applicable to the Skye section of the parish, where Nicolson speaks of 'turf huts,'<sup>336</sup> is one of poor and insubstantial dwellings. The Reverend Macdonald confirms this picture. He describes the 'poor tenants' as 'almost invariably under the necessity of having their cattle under the same roof with themselves without partition, without division, and without a chimney; their houses, therefore, are smoky and filthy in the extreme.'<sup>337</sup> This situation, applicable to the majority of folk in this essentially rural parish, was worse than that accruing among their contemporary counterparts in Tain.

Climbing a little further up the social scale, James Wilson observes that in 1841 Portree possessed a 'little crescent of handsome fronted houses.'<sup>338</sup> The level of comfort afforded by these properties remains undisclosed and may well have been inferior to similar properties in Tain. An 1831 sketch shows the recently constructed property of an alleged founder of a bank in the village, a substantial two-storied dwelling-house, with a roofed porch and two chimneys, apparently built of stone with a slate roof.<sup>339</sup> However, the dwelling of such an influential individual must not be taken as representative of the majority of the more comfortably housed residents of Portree. As regards Raasay, there is merely mention of 'substantial houses' being provided on the estate for the estate and farm managers.<sup>340</sup>

In contrast to the picture obtained in Tain there is much material available concerning the parish's most prestigious property. Raasay House, belonging to the resident heritor, Macleod

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<sup>335</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), p.60.

<sup>336</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.271.

<sup>337</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.226.

<sup>338</sup> Wilson, James (1842), p.280.

<sup>339</sup> Quine, David A., ed. (2001), p.19 and note 29, p.151.

<sup>340</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.189.

of Raasay, passed into the hands of Mr. Rainy in 1843 when bankruptcy forced the sale of the estate, as mentioned earlier. The descriptions of several travellers point up the incredible contrast between this 'seat of taste' with facets of Palladian and Adam style<sup>341</sup> and the dwellings of the majority of Portree's parishioners. However, this contrast is scarcely remarked upon except in terms of a sense of relief at finding such acceptable accommodation in the wilds of the Hebrides. It is noteworthy within the framework of the research questions inherent to this study that the local minister, who remarks upon the elegance of this splendid house,<sup>342</sup> makes no attempt to pass any value judgement, suggesting an acceptance of the *status quo* in relation to his parishioners' accommodation.

Finally, before investigating the situation in Strath, it is appropriate to address the subject of tenurial insecurity, referred to in the previous chapter in connection with occupation. To exemplify, in October 1803 Angus Macdonald, about to lose his tenancy of the farm of Peinphiler, initially requested a house in Portree, but later, in a more distressed communication, begged that, if such accommodation was unavailable, he be given a lot at Shulishader in order to build a shelter for his 'weak Family.'<sup>343</sup> This request typifies the insecurity of parishioners, who were all either tenants of Lord Macdonald or Macleod of Raasay. Whether their housing was woefully inadequate or tolerably satisfactory (as viewed from an early twenty first-century perspective) folk remained in a state of uncertainty as to how long they would retain occupancy. Such a situation would have impacted on their notion of overall cultural identity, of which religious beliefs and affiliation formed an inherent part.

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<sup>341</sup> Roberts, David (2001), pp.9-12 and 15-16.

<sup>342</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.225.

<sup>343</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 832 and 838.



### **A General Skye Picture, Including Strath.**

Insecurity, coupled with the fear of an ensuing increase in rent, created a distinct lack of incentive to undertake improvements. For most Skye folk conditions remained static during the early decades of the nineteenth century, turf dwellings persisting, although stone houses with divot roofs thatched with heather, fern or rush were common.<sup>344</sup> This picture tallies with the description of the typical Hebridean 'black house', although the 'interior division into living quarters and space for cattle'<sup>345</sup> was somewhat primitive in Skye. Indeed, the Reverend John Mackinnon, referring to cases in Strath where partitions had been provided, notes that they tended to be only a few feet high, permitting humans little real separation from cattle and poultry.<sup>346</sup> Floors were bare earth and the fireplace central, an aperture in the roof permitting the smoke to escape, although Nicolson maintains that peat-smoke, despite spreading dirt everywhere, also acted as an effective steriliser and deodoriser.<sup>347</sup> Domestic waste and animal ordure, along with the beasts themselves, tended to be positioned closer to the door than the family accommodation. In conjunction with poor ventilation occasioned by the lack of window cavities, the poor noisome air reaching the inhabitants suffered further deterioration due to the stench created by fish oil in the cruise lamps.<sup>348</sup> Despite claims concerning the sterilising effects of peat-smoke it is undeniable that the vast majority of Skye parishioners experienced an unhygienic and therefore potentially disease-ridden environment (as depicted among the poorest dwellings in Tain parish). Again the potential effects on attitudes to cultural elements require to be acknowledged.

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<sup>344</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.256 and 224-225.

<sup>345</sup> Morrison, Alex (2001), p.328.

<sup>346</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.308.

<sup>347</sup> Morrison, Alex (2001), p.328; Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.224-225.

<sup>348</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.224-225.

Allowing for the perspective of a wealthy traveller, nonetheless the chronic poverty of the dwellings is reflected in the observations of Mrs. Murray, visiting Skye in 1802, who appears not to classify the 'common dwellings' of the inhabitants as actual houses! On the other hand, she regarded the new house of tacksman Lachlan MacKinnon at Liveras, near Broadford, as 'comfortable.'<sup>349</sup> John Mackinnon, indeed, maintains that the tacksmen's dwellings were 'comfortable and commodious, yielding in this respect to none of the same class in the Highlands.'<sup>350</sup> Nevertheless, across Skye a widespread similarity in the housing of the inhabitants is claimed, only the 'more pretentious tacksmen' living in a better class of cottage, with lime used to cement the walls, windows glazed and floors covered in boards.<sup>351</sup> Geikie indeed, travelling in the first half of the nineteenth century, regarded manses as the only alternative to the properties of the lairds for travellers to secure 'decent accommodation.'<sup>352</sup> Apart from such properties, the only notable evidence discovered concerning dwellings superior to the basic 'black house' in Strath resides in the comment that, in Kyleakin, the proprietor had constructed a 'dozen good, slated houses at the beginning of the century,' with aid from the British Fisheries Society.<sup>353</sup>

### Summary.

The overarching impression to be gleaned from the preceding paragraphs is that the vast majority of Strath's population lived out their lives in a context of abject material poverty. Although a slightly higher incidence of material comfort may have existed in the village of Portree, the picture across that parish was probably very similar. However, a higher proportion of Tain residents seemingly enjoyed relative comfort, despite others also enduring a basic

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<sup>349</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), p.32.

<sup>350</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.306.

<sup>351</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.225.

<sup>352</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), p.57.

<sup>353</sup> Mackinnon, Neil (1981), p.175.



existence. In order to investigate the situation more fully other elements of material environment will now undergo cursory examination.

### **Other Material Elements.**

Although evidence from all three parishes tends to be scanty, there is sufficient to gain an impression of such issues as comfort or hardship.

#### **Tain.**

Cameron, however, furnishes a considerable amount of information on diet. He maintains that the 'common food of the inhabitants' was 'chiefly vegetable, consisting of potatoes, oatmeal porridge and cakes, and brose.' Fish formed a staple part of their diet, as it tended to be both plentiful and cheap, being salted and dried in the winter, but butcher meat, being expensive, was rarely eaten by the poorer folk. During seasons of scarcity the poorest people were forced to obtain subsistence from shellfish and seaweed. However, although the potato constituted the principal item of diet, hardship and deprivation in times of crop failure is not specifically recorded in relation to this parish. It could be conjectured, nonetheless, that at such times the country folk would suffer more than the townspeople, the latter benefiting more noticeably from trade.

According to Cameron the farm servants ate 'substantial and wholesome' fare, consisting principally of farm products, rural shopkeepers being able to obtain a little extra comfort by keeping poultry 'at a very trifling expense.' Fishermen, not unnaturally, consumed much fish as well as the staple diet of potatoes.<sup>354</sup>

Although the diet outlined above would tend to suggest monotony, nevertheless privation and malnutrition do not appear to figure large. No information has been obtained about the eating

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<sup>354</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp.2, 13-16 and 7.

habits of the wealthier folk, but greater variety can be conjectured, particularly from the mention of butcher meat, too expensive for the poorer members of the community.

Information concerning household artifacts, an indicator of relative comfort or privation, is negligible for this parish and therefore of little value in the research process. However, available evidence regarding clothing would tend to corroborate the impression created by the brief study of diet, that, despite numbers of inhabitants living in poor housing, extreme privation was uncommon.

Cameron affirms that 'the agricultural inhabitants clothe themselves in corduroys, and the fishers in woolen stuffs; and in general they are both decently and warmly clad.' The female farm-servants sometimes wore "mitches," which they took a 'particular pride in keeping neat and clean,' an indication of behavioural characteristics, which will be investigated at a later stage in this study. Warm blue cloaks were commonly provided for them, although in summer, like the fisher women, they frequently went bare-footed. Worsted stockings and thick shoes, or half boots were worn by the men, the fishermen sporting 'stout shoes or tall sea boots.' Occasional field or day labourers were clad in similar fashion to the other agricultural workers, although their dress was less uniform.<sup>355</sup> The clothing of the poorer classes, therefore, seems to have been simple but adequate in the country and in Inver, the situation in the town receiving less attention, although the description of artisan's clothing as being 'in general, warm and respectable'<sup>356</sup> would suggest a parallel standard to that of the countryside, at least among the better labouring classes. The relatively high proportion of comfortably placed residents are consequently likely to have been even better clad, although no details have been uncovered.

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<sup>355</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp.2 and 14.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p.16.



## Portree.

The few references uncovered concerning the diet of the bulk of Portree's population suggest that it was uncompromisingly sparse, consolidating the picture of extreme material poverty painted in the realm of housing. The minister affirms that 'no people on earth live on a more simple or scanty diet,' adding that 'the greater number of them subsist on potatoes of the worst kind, sometimes with, but oftener without fish.' This gloomy observation is contrasted with the situation in an earlier, though unspecified, period, when the inhabitants had better portions of land, were not subject to the current game laws, and thus had a sufficiency of 'flesh, fish, milk, and venison.'<sup>357</sup> The effect this transition must have had, at the very least in the folk memory, should be taken into consideration within the framework of community attitudes to old and new belief systems. The later Spartan diet is confirmed in a submission made by James Ross, factor on the Raasay estate, to the Deer Forest Commission in 1893, referring to the evidence of an elderly inhabitant who claimed that in the early part of the century 'the people were so poor that they lived for a considerable time on limpets or shell-fish taken off the rocks, with a sprinkling of meal on it.'<sup>358</sup>

Travellers' reports afford a glimpse of the contrasting luxury enjoyed by the few. Regarding food available at an inn, for example, Joseph Mitchell describes the breakfast awaiting the farmers and cattle dealers thronging the hostelry of Sconser in mid-September 1837. Accompanied by 'sundry stoups of whisky bitters,' it included salmon, cod, mackerel, fowls, beef and potatoes,' the table groaning under the weight of the food.<sup>359</sup> Raasay House offered a rich diet of food and drink. Atkinson, arriving unheralded in 1831, pronounces that 'after tea,

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<sup>357</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.225 and 226.

<sup>358</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.142.

<sup>359</sup> Mitchell, Joseph (1971), pp.218 -219.

which was the refreshment, aided by cold meat, collops, herrings, eggs etc' he was offered the finest whisky.<sup>360</sup>

Some hints of luxury enjoyed by the few, a carpet in the 1770s in Raasay House,<sup>361</sup> a large bookcase received by the Chamberlain in 1811<sup>362</sup> and items such as a cast iron garden chair, mahogany knobs and an umbrella stand for the Procurator Fiscal,<sup>363</sup> offers a striking contrast to information supplied about fuel. Nicolson bemoans the destitution caused by the exceptionally wet seasons of 1836 and 1837, when the peats could not be procured and the people were 'forced to consume their turf huts as fuel.'<sup>364</sup>

Again privation for the majority appears to be reflected in the inadequacy of clothing which seems to have been the fate of most Portree parishioners. Referring to the 'poor tenants' of Portree, the Reverend Coll Macdonald asserts that they had 'little either of night or day clothing, and their children' were 'nearly approaching to absolute nakedness.' This situation, taken in conjunction with the smokiness of their dwellings, caused them to be 'as much without cleanliness in their persons as they are in their houses.'<sup>365</sup> A similarly negative picture is painted by James Wilson in the same year (1841). He describes the people of Brochel, a township on Raasay, as 'ill-attired,'<sup>366</sup> although being a comparatively wealthy traveller, his standards may have been somewhat elevated.

Nicolson contends that the need to use meal bags for underclothing or even outer wear for children eased as the nineteenth century progressed, affirming that many of the inhabitants of

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<sup>360</sup> Quine, David A. ed. (2001), p.93.

<sup>361</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.43

<sup>362</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 4561/27.

<sup>363</sup> Procurator Fiscal Papers, Box PF 10, Accn. No. 1990, 13A.

<sup>364</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.271.

<sup>365</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.226.

<sup>366</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), p.61.



the island made their own brogues and clothing.<sup>367</sup> Few residents of Portree would have belonged to the upper stratum of Skye society. Regarding the dress of those in 'better circumstances,' Alexander Campbell, who submitted the Portree entry to the Old Statistical Account in 1793, observes that the men 'appear in tartans, a bonnet, and short hose, and some in a hat, short coat, waistcoat, and breeches of Scotch or English manufacture.'<sup>368</sup> Nicolson affirms that, at the end of the eighteenth century, women's apparel would have been similar to that worn elsewhere in Scotland.<sup>369</sup>

Seemingly external influences of taste and fashion had filtered through to the upper echelons of society in these Skye parishes, but the bulk of the population, constrained by the obvious poverty displayed in their domestic milieu, relied on basic local materials for supplying subsistence level needs. It is apposite at this juncture to comment on the observations of the pre-Disruption minister. The Reverend Coll Macdonald, minister of Portree, who remained in the Established Church at the Disruption but lost the bulk of his congregation, seems somewhat negative and scathing. As in the case of the inadequate housing, he seems to accept the situation, criticise it but offer no words of encouragement.

### **Strath.**

The Strath picture displays similarities to that of Portree, although variable levels of information have been gleaned from the sources. The majority of Strath inhabitants would have suffered much privation when potato crops failed, as they did in Skye on numerous occasions, including 1835 and the following several years.<sup>370</sup> However, the report in the New Statistical Account does not emphasise an overdependence on the potato in Strath, maintaining that the common diet in the years just prior to the Disruption consisted of 'potatoes and

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<sup>367</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.258 and 268.

<sup>368</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), pp.160 -161.

<sup>369</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.208 -209.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., pp.256 -257.

herring, varied with meal and milk.'<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless the potato, despite being poor in quality, undoubtedly formed the staple dietary ingredient for most residents, although brochan, or gruel, with oaten bannocks, took its place when the crop was exhausted or failed. Little meat was eaten, although a certain amount of fish was consumed in season and, across the island, a reasonable amount of butter, cheese, and milk from cows, goats and sheep was consumed, each household storing a barrellful of bland, or fermented whey, which they regarded as health-giving.<sup>372</sup>

Travellers, however, reinforce the impression of an impoverished diet and consequent threats of malnutrition. Mitchell, visiting the district in 1847, was struck by the offensive smell of the diseased potato crop at Broadford, which had taken hold over miles of the country, deliberating on the sadness occasioned by the 'chief food of 18,000 people in this island all at once destroyed.'<sup>373</sup>

No evidence has been uncovered concerning a diet as rich as that enjoyed at Raasay House or even that offered at Sconser Inn. Although this does not necessarily preclude its existence, the absence of comments by the same travellers who visited Portree may well be indicative.

The poverty of the majority of Strath inhabitants is reflected in the few references to artefacts. MacKinnon, for example, reiterates the same devastating dependence on peat as fuel referred to in relation to Portree.<sup>374</sup> Cruisic lamps for lighting have been mentioned earlier, other pre-Disruption references merely alluding to working tools, a cast-iron pot for dyeing plus looms and spinning wheels.<sup>375</sup> The average resident of Portree parish would probably have been similarly placed. Smith's observation in 1860 that beds of heather and ferns plus stools and

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<sup>371</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.178.

<sup>372</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.210-211.

<sup>373</sup> Mitchell, Joseph (1971), p.222.

<sup>374</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), pp. 186-187.

<sup>375</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.256; Lamont, the Reverend D. (1984), p.127.



stones provided the only furnishings in the huts of locals, somewhat Spartan and primitive, suggests no improvement over the situation earlier in the century.<sup>376</sup> The allusion to a teapot and beds in the farmhouse at Camusumary,<sup>377</sup> scarcely gives any impression of the artefacts belonging to a more materially comfortable tenant. Lack of evidence concerning more sophisticated household furnishings among such members of the parish does not definitively preclude their existence, but does tend to support the gradually unfolding picture of a parish where fewer residents than in Portree and most certainly than in Tain lived at a level above mere subsistence.

As regards clothing, the observations relating to Portree are equally applicable to Strath, probably even fewer parishioners belonging to the upper stratum of Skye society. The Strath minister, reporting in *The New Statistical Account*, affirms the fact that clothes tended to be home-made, generally fashioned in wool, utilising domestically produced dyes.<sup>378</sup> Women were barefooted, their dress consisting of 'very short petticoats and short jackets.'<sup>379</sup> Additionally this minister, who kept his flock with him in the Established Church, demonstrates his awareness of his parishioners' industriousness and would seem to reflect a positive attitude towards them, in contrast to that adopted by the Portree minister.

### Summary.

In this chapter similarities and dissimilarities in material conditions have been witnessed in the socio-economic background of the parishes. The relatively adequate level of material existence experienced by many of Tain's residents as opposed to the deprivation and hardship suffered by the majority in the Skye parishes, especially Strath, has been demonstrated in the

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<sup>376</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1983), pp.163 -164.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p.219.

<sup>378</sup> *The New Statistical Account of Scotland* (1845), p.308.

<sup>379</sup> Lamont, the Reverend D. (1984), pp.128 -129.

latter part of this chapter. Interestingly, however, the pattern that has emerged would not appear to form the basis for considering privation versus comfort as significant factors affecting Disruption reaction. The one hint of a possible influence resides in the attitudes of the Skye ministers regarding the material poverty being experienced by their parishioners, the encouraging stance of the Strath minister being in notable contrast to the somewhat derogatory one of the Portree cleric.

As regards security, Tain parishioners appear to have been undergoing a comparatively settled period, clearances from the land not figuring as an issue in the sources. Portree and Strath, however, were suffering constant tenurial insecurity and repeated bouts of major clearance, both before and after the Disruption. Raasay and Strath, indeed, seem to have been hit harder in the 1850s than they were before, although notable examples of relocation took place in the earlier decades of the century in both places. An exploration of the relationship of these forced movements of population to evangelical activity will be undertaken in a later chapter, but certainly the association of clearances with Free Church adherence is already in question within the communities being studied.

The Skye parishes tend to fit into the general Highland and Island socio-economic pattern of increasing devotion of land to sheep farming and vulnerability to crop failure, as painted by Cameron.<sup>380</sup> Tain, on the other hand, appears to fit more closely into a Lowland rural pattern of improved agricultural land, with a small burgh apparently successfully inter-relating with its hinterland.

Tain, indeed, would seem to have benefited from the prestige linked to its status as a Royal Burgh, attracting professional men, commerce and artisans. Being less remote than Skye its communication facilities, introducing into the town newspapers, books and attendant ideas,

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<sup>380</sup> Cameron, Ewen (2001), p.204.



may well have created an ethos of receptiveness to new fashions and movements, either religious or secular. Travellers passed through Portree and Strath, but probably left little impression on the majority of inhabitants, with whom they had no intercourse. Remoteness and the struggle for survival would have created their own barriers to communication. Nonetheless, new ideas did reach the people. As will be perceived in later chapters, missionaries and evangelical preachers spread a new fervent religion throughout the wilds of Portree parish, although Strath was apparently barely touched. Such evangelical enthusiasm was also seemingly indigenous to Tain. What lay behind the apparent spiritual similarities between two socio-economically dissimilar parishes and the contrasting reactions of two communities geographically contiguous and socio-economically alike?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the daily existence of parishioners it is necessary to explore the cultural milieu, which incorporates education, language, customs and beliefs. The next chapter will explore these elements, which help to determine how folk react to other ideas and events, and attempt to relate them to the socio-economic material already discussed and serve to pave the way for an exploration of the various facets of the religious background of the parishes, as well as to elicit further pointers towards Responses to the Disruption.

## **CHAPTER 4. CULTURAL MILIEU.**

### **EDUCATION, LANGUAGE, CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS.**

The socio-economic overview of the parishes has served to create a partial picture of the forces determining the daily fabric of inhabitants' lives, as intimated in the closing paragraph of the last chapter. However, other relevant factors would also have contributed to the attitude taken by individuals and communities to religion, the central pivot of life during the period under consideration. In the sense that 'culture' involves every aspect of the life of an individual or group, notable sections of the 'cultural milieu' have already been explored. However, other features, constituting a narrower notion of 'culture,' contributed to the total experience of parishioners. These features embrace education, language, customs and beliefs. Additionally, local behavioural characteristics would interact with all the varying facets of life in each parish to produce a unique set of circumstances which could have shaped people's reactions to particular events, such as the Disruption. Education will be tackled first, as it had a close link with the church, a fact which will be explored further in later chapters.

#### **Education.**

##### **Literacy and Educational Opportunities.**

An 1822 survey in the Highlands, in which more than half the parishes returned the schedules issued to them, concluded that half the inhabitants over the age of eight could not read, one third of families lived over two miles from the nearest school, the same number of families lacked copies of the Scriptures and Gaelic was the mother tongue of three quarters of the folk (excluding Caithness, Orkney and Shetland). Although admitting that ability to read only constitutes a partial education, the report maintains that gaining 'personal access to the divine



revelation' renders reading as the 'most effective instrument of moral improvement.'<sup>381</sup> This contention reflects the fact that knowledge of the Scriptures was at that period the principal aim of education.

How do the three parishes fit into this overall picture? The figures for inability to read in the over eight age group are approximately 33% in Tain, 60% in Portree and 75% in Strath.<sup>382</sup> The comparatively high literacy level in Tain reflects its socio-economic profile and its wide availability of schooling, to be explored shortly. Likewise the low literacy levels on Skye mirror the inhabitants' disadvantaged socio-economic status coupled with disappointing educational facilities. Distance from such establishments would also have been a contributory factor. Only about 33% of Tain families lived over two miles from the nearest school and none over five miles. On Skye, however, due to the size of parishes and paucity of schools, the picture was very different. In Portree parish 47% of families lived over two miles from the nearest school, 55% of this number being more than five miles away. The situation was even worse in Strath, the equivalent figures being 60% and 97%.

Personal access to the Scriptures could well have affected attitudes to religion. In Tain only about 20% of families lacked Bibles, whereas in Portree the number was approximately 55% and in Strath about 67%. As regards language, Gaelic was the mother tongue of about 67% of families in Tain and approximately 95% in both Portree and Strath.<sup>383</sup>

Thus Tain exceeded the Highland average as regards literacy levels and availability of family Bibles, roughly equalling the average for physical proximity to schooling. Portree and Strath present a worse picture overall, Strath being even less favoured than Portree. Consequently it could be postulated that the Skye parishes would have been more open to oral transmission of

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<sup>381</sup> Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands (1826), pp.25 and 32.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., pp.47 and 53.

<sup>383</sup> Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands (1826), pp.47 and 53.

religious doctrine, evangelical preaching having already been seen to exert considerable influence in Portree. Language will undergo fuller examination later, but the bare statistics outlined above suggest that Tain was more English orientated than the average Highland parish, including the two Skye communities being studied.

Various factors affected educational opportunities. Physical differentials of accessibility have been alluded to above, the benefits of living within the burgh of Tain being obvious on this score. Such distance-related problems are highlighted in a petition (undated, but probably presented in 1801 or 1802), addressed by tenants of Heast, Boreraig, Suishnish, Kilbride and Torrin, Strath townships far distant from the parochial school in Broadford, in which they bemoan this factor and their consequent necessity of hiring a schoolteacher at their own expense.<sup>384</sup> Another issue creating unequal educational opportunity was the need, observed in relation to Strath, for many children to assist with such occupations as harvesting and cutting peats, numbers attending school in that parish at the end of the eighteenth century dropping to about half in the summer months.<sup>385</sup> The above-mentioned issue of socio-economic status is reflected in the observation that tacksmen in Skye in the early nineteenth century were 'generally educated gentlemen.'<sup>386</sup> Thus the higher percentage of materially 'comfortable' inhabitants of Tain, noted in the socio-economic background, would not only help to determine the greater educational provision in the parish but also enable more children to benefit from it. Economics undoubtedly played its part.

However, linked to economics was a religious-based enthusiasm for education in the burgh of Tain. This is reflected in the Council's investigation in 1839 into the 'advisability' of employing someone to teach prisoners in the jail how to read, and their authorisation of the

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<sup>384</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221/83/63.

<sup>385</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.224.

<sup>386</sup> Mitchell, Joseph (1971), p.210.



Treasurer to 'apply to the Edinburgh Society for Forty Bibles and Psalmbooks in English and Gaelic for the use of the Prisoners and other poor persons in the town.....'<sup>387</sup>

### **Educational Provision.**

#### **Tain.**

Schooling was seemingly well established by the mid-eighteenth century, there being a schoolmistress and a music teacher as well as the burgh schoolmaster. The record of the 'Grammar School' in the second half of the century seems to have been excellent, a number of boys being 'sent forth into the world with classical as well as other attainments that enabled them to shine, and to rise to honourable positions in life.'<sup>388</sup>

According to the New Statistical Account, the parochial school in Tain provided a curriculum of English reading, writing and arithmetic, with several scholars receiving instruction in Latin and Greek, perhaps due to the existence of the prestigious Academy, which will be investigated shortly. Other establishments available were two day and boarding schools for girls, where the 'usual female accomplishments' were taught, two private English schools, a 'private class for young children of both sexes' and a Gaelic Society School. The last-named institution had been set up mainly to serve the village of Inver, 'which is wholly a Gaelic population, and which is, besides, at an impracticable distance from the town.' The Society was seemingly addressing the inequality of educational opportunity, both geographical and linguistic, and permitting a wider spread of religious attitudes through the parish. Indeed, the NSA author maintains that folk were generally 'very anxious to secure for their children the best education their circumstances will permit' and that the 'parish is supplied with the means of education, to almost as great an extent as could be desired.'<sup>389</sup> The Church, whose

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<sup>387</sup> Council Book of Tain, B70/6/3, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1839.

<sup>388</sup> Taylor, Reverend William (1882), p.97.

<sup>389</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.297.

responsibility for education was paramount, was apparently confident that children were receiving the necessary ammunition for internalising the Word of God. However, Cameron (1841) considers that the linguistic problem was not being taken seriously, teaching generally being undertaken in English despite Gaelic still being the vernacular for many, and consequently, coupled with poor attendance during summer months, education was less successful than it might have been.<sup>390</sup>

The Council Minutes contain more specific information about schools in Tain, including grants awarded to establishments such as the Female Boarding School (October 1840 and May 1846, for example), or Mr. Bain's school (December 1842).<sup>391</sup> The Inverness Courier highlights the importance attached to religious instruction in its report that 'accurate knowledge' in Scripture was indicated in the public examination of the former school in June, 1843, attended by the Reverend Mackintosh.<sup>392</sup>

The Town Clerk's Records also include information about schooling. References to a Grammar School occur, for example at meetings held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1818 and 29<sup>th</sup> September 1820, plus a letter of resignation from the teacher dated 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1835.<sup>393</sup> However, it is unclear whether or not this constituted a separate establishment at that time from the parochial school. The meetings alluded to were attended by the Heritors, central figures in the provision of church accommodation, as well as magistrates, who would undoubtedly have figured among the kirk elders. More direct church participation will be investigated in a later chapter.

The apogee of educational provision in Tain was the Academy, a prestigious institution attracting scholars both from within and outwith the parish. Many sources disclose

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<sup>390</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), p.3.

<sup>391</sup> Council Book of Tain, B70/6/4, pp.67, 480 and 239.

<sup>392</sup> Inverness Courier, 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1843.

<sup>393</sup> Records in Custody of Town Clerk of Royal Burgh of Tain, HRA/ Bundle 7/2.



information regarding its founding. The Seaforth Papers include the appeal to the public for funds, the signatories of which constituted a general committee and included a number of prominent local landowners apart from Seaforth, such as Sir Charles Ross of Balnagown, Donald McLeod of Geanies and Hugh Rose of Glastullich. The backing of the Burgh is highlighted in the Papers, as well as the support of the minister.<sup>394</sup>

Hugh Rose, son of a former Tain minister, was the key figure in the foundation of the establishment and its most generous single contributor. The Academy, granted a crown charter by George III in 1809, opened its doors in February 1813 with about 130 pupils.<sup>395</sup> Its stated purpose was to provide 'for the youth of the three northern counties a good education, founded on morality and religion, such as might be expected to produce the happiest fruits to themselves, their parents and connections, and contribute ultimately to the improvement of the country which gave them birth, and to the general advantage of the kingdom.'<sup>396</sup> These lofty ideals were carefully underpinned by religious motives.

Among the directors and members of the committee appointed to examine candidates for the teaching posts was the Reverend Angus McIntosh, again emphasising the involvement of the church in all branches of educational provision. The range of subjects to be taught was enormous, including English, Mathematics, Surveying, Sciences, Classics, French and Geography.<sup>397</sup>

A majority of pupils, both boys and girls, came from the parish. For example, in 1832, about 75% of both male and female pupils came from families resident in Tain, only one female pupil attending from further than an adjacent county. Socio-economically they tended to be

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<sup>394</sup> Seaforth Papers, GD 46/12/106(1), GD 46/12/106 (2) and GD46/12/109 (2).

<sup>395</sup> Munro, R.W. and Munro, Jean (1966), pp.105-107.

<sup>396</sup> Robertson, Allan G.R. (n.d. but post-1967), p.104.

<sup>397</sup> Minutes of the Tain Academy, 1827-1855, p.5; 1810-1826, pp.123 and 112; 1827-1855, pp.18-19 and 35-36.

children of comparatively high status parents, fathers being generally professional, mercantile, military, farming, estate or official employees or involved in skilled crafts.<sup>398</sup>

### **The Skye Parishes.**

The Skye parishes tended to be served by parochial schools of varying quality, some private or charitable schools, offering a very basic education in reading, and circulating Gaelic schools. Lord Teignmouth, following tours in the late 1820s, observes that 'the moral and religious improvement of Sky has advanced lately, and is not a little attributable to the operations of the Gaelic schools,'<sup>399</sup> corroborating impressions which will be alluded to in a later chapter concerning the efficacy of teachers in spreading the evangelical message.

Smith on the other hand, visiting the island in mid-century, is less sanguine about the educational establishments, although any mention of contribution to religious knowledge is lacking from his somewhat derisory summary. 'The schools in Skye..... are scattered thinly up and down the Island, and the pupils are unable to attend steadily on account of the distances they have to travel, and the minor agricultural avocations in which they are at intervals engaged. The schoolmaster is usually a man of no surpassing intelligence or acquirement; he is wretchedly remunerated, and his educational aids and appliances, such as books, maps, &, are defective.' However, he does add that 'a Skye school is better than no school at all.'<sup>400</sup>

Allowing for the obvious prejudices of a man travelling from areas where education of a higher quality was available, he basically enumerates the disadvantages intimated earlier concerning distance and labouring requirements (not minor to the families concerned!).

Regarding the capabilities of teachers, these were somewhat disparate, the Presbytery

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<sup>398</sup> Tain Royal Academy Records, HRA/R59/12.

<sup>399</sup> Teignmouth, Lord (1836), p.153.

<sup>400</sup> Smith, Alexander (n.d.), p..341.



probably demanding more rigorous qualifications from parochial schoolmasters than could be enforced in voluntary schools.

### **Portree.**

In 1822 five schools were enumerated in the parish, one parochial, the others established by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge and the Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness Gaelic Schools Societies respectively.<sup>401</sup> No exact details are disclosed, but their impact in spreading the religious message, as mentioned above, was probably considerable, although variable over time and space.

Skye Presbytery was inherently heavily involved in the selection and continuing approval of parish schoolmasters. Presbytery Minutes are liberally sprinkled with references to the annual school examination, some records including useful comments on the result of the examination, as the following two examples illustrate. On 7<sup>th</sup> April 1819 girls are noted among the pupils, a fact confirmed on other dates.<sup>402</sup> This seemingly reflects a fairly enlightened attitude towards educational provision, although the level of schooling offered to girls remains unspecified. Satisfaction with pupil progress led the examiners to regard the teacher as displaying 'diligence and attention,' proof required for his continuing certification.<sup>403</sup> The examination registered on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1842 reveals that 45 of the 70 pupils were present, that instruction took place in reading, writing, arithmetic and English grammar, with two pupils also taking Latin lessons, that the school was 'well taught' and the teacher also held a Sabbath School. This particular entry also mentions a Subscription School in the Braes district (in the south of the parish), attended by 25 pupils, offering the same branches of education and being equally 'well taught,' as well as a Gaelic School in the same area, offering a good schooling to 50

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<sup>401</sup> Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands (1826), p.67.

<sup>402</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/2, p.393.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p.393.

pupils.<sup>404</sup> The Minutes also prove the existence of the Society school in Raasay, later taken over by the parish.<sup>405</sup> This establishment was also subject to examination, although at less regular intervals.

Unequal educational opportunities have been thoroughly emphasised in relation to the distance factor. Smith refers to the poor quality of teaching and educational aids, but the problems of suitable school buildings also affected educational provision in Portree. Such buildings were not always readily available. The Raasay schoolmaster, based at Arnish in 1841, possessed no proper schoolroom, consequently probably teaching 'pupils in his own house.'<sup>406</sup> Responsibility for furnishing suitable accommodation for the parochial school lay with the heritors. On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1804 the Presbytery expressed grave anxiety about the ruinous and dangerous state of Portree's schoolhouse. Consequently they determined to address a letter to Lord Macdonald's Commissioners requesting urgent repairs. There is no record of the problem being resolved, numerous references, including the ongoing reluctance of Macleod of Raasay to contribute towards a schoolhouse in another part of the parish (he displayed similar intransigence about the church building), continuing for nearly a decade.<sup>407</sup> By 1841 the knotty problem of adequate accommodation for schooling had seemingly been addressed, the minister maintaining that 'the parochial teachers have all the accommodations to which they are by law entitled.'<sup>408</sup> However, the adequacy of the letter of the law is uncertain.

### **Strath.**

The situation was not dissimilar to that appertaining in Portree. Presbyterian insistence on parochial schoolmasters possessing qualifications in Latin and Greek (specified in July 1799)

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., CH2/330/4, p.14.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., CH2/330/2, pp.195, 210, 255, 269 and 302; CH2/330/4, pp.49, 89 and 150.

<sup>406</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), p.72.

<sup>407</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/2, pp.190, 192-194, 244 and 248-250.

<sup>408</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.233.



led to discontinuities in provision, as noted in July 1801 for example, a teacher appointed in December 1832 being quoted as qualified in these two languages.<sup>409</sup> However, to further emphasise that inequality of opportunity was related to accident of date as well as place of birth, four schools are recorded in 1822, as opposed to the five existing in the late 1830s. Apart from the parochial school, the others were supported respectively by the Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness Gaelic Societies.<sup>410</sup>

The Reverend John Mackinnon, showing a similar interest in education to his father, considered that the parish would benefit from three additional schools, the townships being very scattered. Thus 'all our wants in the way of education' would be supplied 'in a manner sufficient for the diffusion of useful and salutary knowledge; and it is pleasant to observe that the people in general are becoming more alive to the advantages of education.'<sup>411</sup>

This support for education is reinforced by Neil MacKinnon's assertion that there was indeed a desire for literacy among the people, which manifested itself more strongly after the publication of the Gaelic Bible. He affirms that a John Mackinnon kept schools in different parts of the parish, Breakish in 1814-15, Torrin in 1815, Borreraig from 1818 and Heast in 1820-21,<sup>412</sup> explaining in interview that the teacher would have moved on to another township once the children could read the Bible. This obvious reference to a Gaelic School Society circulating school seemingly emphasises that the importance attached to education by the minister, even when this was conducted within a framework counter to his own beliefs, outweighed his antipathy towards evangelical teaching, a fact which will be explored in a later chapter.

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<sup>409</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/33/2, pp.139 and 162-163; CH2/330/3, p.330.

<sup>410</sup> Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands (1826), p.67.

<sup>411</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.312-313.

<sup>412</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), p.37.

As the decades of the early nineteenth century passed, more schools were founded, such as Churches' Ladies Association and subscription schools, although the education was basic and the numbers of these establishments fluctuated. A 'Gratis' school, involving free instruction, was set up in Kyleakin by the Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor, its aim being to rescue people 'from miserable superstitions.'<sup>413</sup> Significantly, the aim of all these societies was to instil an ability to read the Gaelic Bible, an aim which tended to be accompanied by the effective imparting of an evangelical message in Portree and other areas, but which apparently failed in such a mission in Strath. Although attendance would also have been variable, the reasons would have been similar to those accruing in Portree and the country areas of Tain, where evangelicalism was more successfully disseminated. Consequently, although differential abilities to attend school would have affected access to the Scriptures, the reception of specific religious attitudes would appear to have had a complex relationship with schooling.

As in Portree, the heavy involvement of the church in education is likewise reflected in the examination of schools, the report on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1823, for example, deeming Strath school to be satisfactory.<sup>414</sup> The heritors also played their part in appointing teachers, paying salaries and furnishing assistance in providing a schoolhouse, as intimated in relation to Portree, relevant examples in Strath being found in the Lord Macdonald Papers of 17<sup>th</sup> April 1802, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1818 and 1809.<sup>415</sup>

Before exploring the related topic of availability of reading material, one final point could appropriately be made. It is possible that some teachers may have been a source of inspiration to the people, such as Malcolm Nicolson of Portree or Alexander MacLeod of Raasay, to be

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<sup>413</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), pp. 195-196.

<sup>414</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/33/3, p.2.

<sup>415</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 719, 1741 and 4550.



mentioned in a later chapter, or the charismatic Norman MacLeod, Gaelic Society teacher at Unish, whose role in the commencement of the 1841-42 revival will be likewise be outlined in a later chapter.

### **Libraries, Books and Newspapers.**

Although many parts of the Highlands and Islands, including Skye and rural parts of Easter Ross, still relied heavily on oral transmission of information, beliefs and attitudes in the first half of the nineteenth century, nonetheless the written word was becoming more significant, particularly in burghs like Tain. As few people could afford to purchase books or even newspapers, their availability through the establishment of libraries became significant for literate parishioners.

### **Tain.**

In 1819 the Inverness Courier reported a desire for the foundation of Evangelical Libraries in the Highlands, containing religious books only. Associations promoting such libraries already existed in Perthshire, the proposition being that they should be inter-denominational and supported by small subscriptions. The report added that subscriptions in Tain would be collected at the office of the British Linen Company.<sup>416</sup> Although no definitive information concerning the outcome of such a venture in the parish has come to light, a Subscription Library is noted to have existed by 1823.<sup>417</sup> This same library is alluded to in an 1827 report about public libraries in the North, an association having been established in Tain concurrently with one in Inverness, founded in 1820.<sup>418</sup> Its existence is undeniable, its aims can be conjectured, but its influence and support remain undisclosed, and its length of operation is uncertain. The NSA affirms that a number of libraries, both 'parochial and circulating,' had

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<sup>416</sup> *Inverness Courier*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1819.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1823.

<sup>418</sup> Barron, James (1907), p.29.

been set up periodically, but had disappeared, principally due to bad management. Only a public reading-room, stocking several newspapers, and a library within the Academy, for the 'use of the pupils,' are declared by the writer to be still extant in 1837.<sup>419</sup> The impact of these resources cannot be realistically measured in view of the scarcity of detailed information. However, the public availability of newspapers would have ensured that Tain inhabitants had the opportunity to learn about the progress of the Ten Years' Conflict and it could be postulated that this knowledge would have prompted deliberation and discussion.

As regards the Academy library, the only information uncovered in the research process specifying its content dates from 1849 onwards. Although the stock would have been built up gradually, nonetheless the variety of subject matter available to pupils undoubtedly reflects that of earlier days, a variety which, covering many disciplines, included Bibles in several languages and theological works such as Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* and Blair's *Sermons*.<sup>420</sup> These better-educated members of Tain society could have disputed many topics, so theological and religio-political arguments would not have been outwith their grasp.

Although local landowners and the wealthier burgesses may well have possessed small libraries or collections of books, no material regarding these has been unearthed. However, the church did possess libraries. Several had been established in Easter Ross in the early eighteenth century under the Kirkwood scheme 'for free public libraries in every presbytery.' Although the emphasis was on religion, other subjects such as history, rhetoric, philology, literature and medicine were also included. The scheme failed due to inadequate planning for 'maintenance and updating of stock,' as well as difficulties faced during the 1715 Jacobite Rising. Indeed, few still existed by 1826, apart from the sessional and presbyterial libraries of

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<sup>419</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.297.

<sup>420</sup> Tain Royal Academy Records, HRA/R59/14.



Tain, which, by that date, merely provided religious literature.<sup>421</sup> Nonetheless literate parishioners would have had access to these works, which would probably have principally espoused an evangelical doctrine and message. Consequently, such parishioners and those with whom they mixed, through available books and newspapers could have become well informed about religious issues of the day. This circumstance, added to the personal influence of such figures as the minister, teachers and prominent laymen, would undoubtedly have given them much food for thought.

### **The Skye Parishes.**

Concurrently with the opening of a Subscription Library in Tain, a similar institution was established on Skye,<sup>422</sup> although unfortunately no information is disclosed regarding location. It could be postulated that Portree, the most substantial community on the island, would be the natural choice, but it would be unwise to formulate any conclusions without corroborative evidence. However, it could realistically be assumed that access to books, apart from the Bible, would be confined to a very small proportion of the island's residents.

The 1822 report explored earlier in the chapter reveals that in Portree 178 families out of approximately 397 possessed Bibles, whereas in Strath the figure was only 135 out of an approximate total of 405 families.<sup>423</sup> The reasons for the differential can only be conjectured, but may well have been related to such factors as poverty and opportunity. However, it could be hypothesised that the higher proportion of Bibles existing in Portree may have been a factor assisting in receptiveness of the earnest evangelical message sweeping the parish, which was referred to in Chapter 2.

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<sup>421</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M.(1981), p.134.

<sup>422</sup> Barron, James (1907), p.29.

<sup>423</sup> Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands (1826), p.47.

Apart from the Bible, ownership of books, already recognised as a significant resource for the acquisition of knowledge, tended to be the prerogative of the few wealthier inhabitants of Portree, according to the scanty references unearthed. Boswell, visiting Raasay House in 1773, remarked upon 'some elegantly bound books on a large table, in short, all the marks of an improved life.'<sup>424</sup> The Enlightenment had doubtless touched Raasay's proprietor, whereas it probably bypassed the bulk of the population! The Chamberlain likewise was able to indulge in the joys of reading, as the account of 30<sup>th</sup> May 1811 for a large bookcase reveals.<sup>425</sup>

The two references discovered in relation to Strath paint a similar picture. The prevalence of a high degree of culture and love of learning was witnessed among the upper echelons of society, Dr. Johnson observing at Corriechatachain (home of a substantial tacksman) that astounding collections of books were to be found in such houses, in more than one language, the literature of their own people not being neglected.<sup>426</sup> However, a desire for books, unaccompanied by the means to procure many, is displayed in the observations of Geikie during a visit to the island of Pabba, probably in the 1840s. The small tenant, when asked what he would like as a gift from his grateful visitor, requested a copy of *Josephus*. Despite a 'scanty' knowledge of English, 'he used to read English books aloud to his children,' although probably a high proportion of the contents would have been unintelligible to reader and audience alike.<sup>427</sup>

Thus an enthusiasm for knowledge and education outweighed its accessibility in Skye, the inhabitants of at least the burgh of Tain having greater opportunities on this score. The effects on the research questions embodied in this study have already been shown to be complex, as numerous influential factors interwove in different ways in individual parishes. One of these

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<sup>424</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.50.

<sup>425</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 4561/27.

<sup>426</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.223.

<sup>427</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.398-399.



factors is that of language and another is the interaction between local circumstances and the literature it inspired, which in its turn affected the lives of the people.

### **Language.**

Reference has already been made to the issue of English versus Gaelic, particularly in relation to education and the ability to absorb influences from the Lowlands. The problem of understanding the Scriptural messages when taught in an unfamiliar language is obvious, but the issue of the relationship of language to an overall cultural environment must not be underestimated. An attempt to disseminate religious information in a language foreign to the audience and embodying a completely different set of norms can at best lead to some misunderstandings, at worst be totally uncomprehended or even seen as threatening to the fabric of that society. The linguistic situation within the parishes being studied does display differentials, which therefore need to be taken into account in a consideration of local forces affecting behaviour at the Disruption.

### **Tain.**

The situation in Tain regarding English speakers appears to have been somewhat unusual for the northern Highlands, one of the facets suggesting a community in transition as intimated in Chapter 2. The 1822 report explored above observes that 185 families living in the parish understood English best and 377 Gaelic best. This is in distinct contrast to nearby rural parishes, the equivalent figures for Fearn being 18 and 286 and for Edderton 36 and 176. It would appear that Tain's prestige as a Royal Burgh and its historic links with the Lowlands, as intimated in earlier chapters, are reflected in its higher percentage of English speakers. The contrast with Skye parishes is likewise remarkable, only 16 families out of 397 and 23 out of

405 in Portree and Strath respectively being more familiar with English than Gaelic.<sup>428</sup> The implications for spreading the Word in Gaelic are quite clear.

In Tain, during the pre-Disruption decades both English and Gaelic were employed in the church,<sup>429</sup> highly significant in the transmission of the Scriptures. The NSA identifies an unsurprising split in linguistic usage between town and country. The country people, apart from the higher ranks, plus the Inver fisher folk predominantly spoke Gaelic, whereas a majority of townspeople, as well as the country gentry, used English as their principal tongue. Gaelic was acknowledged to have seen a recent rapid decline in usage, fluency among townspeople under the age of twenty or thirty being rare and the language never heard 'among the children in the streets.'<sup>430</sup> Indeed, the absence of Gaelic from the proposed curriculum of Tain Academy in 1810<sup>431</sup> suggests that its significance for better-educated parishioners was already negligible. Although the change in the countryside was less remarkable, with fewer folk speaking English only,<sup>432</sup> the most significant change recorded between the OSA of the 1790s and the NSA, written in 1837, was that of language. Linked with the accessibility of books and newspapers outlined above, this reflects an ability to ingest ideas from outwith the Gaelic culture. Such economic, social and cultural influences from the Lowlands and England would have included religious dissension and theological disputation. The elements of these latter fields relating to the issues of the Ten Years' Conflict may have been more readily appreciated within the broader 'cultural' field affecting Tain's English speakers than in the 'cultural' context of the lives of the purely Gaelic speakers in the three parishes.

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<sup>428</sup> Inverness Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands (1826), pp.53 and 47.

<sup>429</sup> Withers, Charles W. (1984), p.306.

<sup>430</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.293.

<sup>431</sup> Register of Deeds in the Burgh and Court of Tain, Book First, B70/4/2.

<sup>432</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.293.



## Portree.

The material trawled tends to emphasise the continuing prevalence of Gaelic, probably reflecting the fact that most parishioners had little intercourse with the outside world during this period. Cooper refers in an overall sense to the islanders' Gaelic culture and language,<sup>433</sup> although Withers maintains that trade between Glasgow and the western isles had served to introduce some English to places like Portree in the later eighteenth century, creating a general decline of Gaelic in the village.<sup>434</sup> Nonetheless, Atkinson, travelling in 1831, observed that English was 'not much spoken' in the parish.<sup>435</sup>

Withers paints a linguistic picture for the years between 1822 and 1833, although it is unclear whether Raasay and its islands are included in his overview. He affirms that although the teacher in the parochial school was qualified to teach Gaelic he was 'never called upon to do so.'<sup>436</sup> How much the pupils understood the English employed as the medium for their education is debateable, reflecting the earlier point that lack of communication in the native tongue could preclude any reasonable understanding of the material being studied! Indeed, it is interesting that in 1822 84% to 100% of the inhabitants understood Gaelic better than English,<sup>437</sup> although information is lacking regarding those who could only understand Gaelic. Parishioners able to communicate better in English were likely to have been among the upper echelons of society, as in the country areas of Tain.

The NSA reveals the increasing significance of English, contending that, although the 'language generally spoken in the parish is Gaelic, 'the 'facility of intercourse with the low country, by means of steam-navigation and Parliamentary roads,' has created in the people a

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<sup>433</sup> Cooper, Derek (1979), p.2.

<sup>434</sup> Withers, Charles W. (1984), p.257.

<sup>435</sup> Quine, David A., ed. (2001), p.106.

<sup>436</sup> Withers, Charles W. (1984), p.138.

<sup>437</sup> Withers, Charles W. (1984), p.85.

‘taste for the English language’ and a desire to learn it.<sup>438</sup> This suggests that a change in attitude and opportunity was beginning to occur. However, the spread of the evangelical message, undertaken in the parish generally by local men, as will be demonstrated in a later chapter, was likely to have taken place in Gaelic, the medium which would have not only been more meaningful intellectually but also would have spoken to their hearts in comprehensible cultural terms. Information regarding the religious debates in the Lowlands may have been conveyed in either English or Gaelic, but most folk were probably still too immersed in Gaelic culture to appreciate the cultural framework of the dissension, as suggested above.

### **Strath.**

Little detailed information about the language situation has come to light in the sources, although much of the material relating to Portree would have been similarly applicable. The NSA again refers to the ‘corruption’ of the language with English words and phrases, attributing it to a recent increase of communication with the south,<sup>439</sup> (probably related to the necessity of many to seek temporary employment in the Lowlands). However, in concurrence with observations in the OSA,<sup>440</sup> it declares Gaelic to be the language of the district, as well as generally the language of preaching.<sup>441</sup> As in Portree, the solidity of the language is emphasised by an estimated percentage of between 84% and 100% of folk understanding Gaelic better in 1822<sup>442</sup> and Atkinson, visiting in the early 1830s, commenting that ‘English is not much spoken.’<sup>443</sup> In the 1840s, the tenant on Pabba, referred to earlier, spoke only a little English, conversation between himself and his wife being conducted in Gaelic.<sup>444</sup> Indeed, its

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<sup>438</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.226.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

<sup>440</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), p.227.

<sup>441</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.308.

<sup>442</sup> Withers, Charles W. (1984), p.85.

<sup>443</sup> Quine, David A., ed. (2001), p.106.

<sup>444</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.397-399.



importance in education was fully recognised in the early decades of the century in order to communicate skills and knowledge.<sup>445</sup>

A key issue of Gaelic usage in terms of the current study is its continuing prominence in the church.<sup>446</sup> Two travellers, Catherine Sinclair in the 1830s and Geikie in the 1840s, observe that services in Strath were conducted in both Gaelic and English.<sup>447</sup> This is in accordance with practice in Tain and Portree, reflecting a recognition of the necessity of addressing congregations in their first language. However, as Gaelic dialects varied considerably, it would have been of considerable benefit to Strath and Tain parishioners that their ministers in the pre-Disruption years had been born and bred locally. The nuances that would have meant so much to the listeners could well have been missing in Portree, where the minister had been raised elsewhere. The contribution of this linguistic factor to the reaction of parishioners in 1843 should not be overlooked.

### Customs.

Although Tain has been shown to have been essentially a community in transition, the burgh in particular becoming more oriented towards the English language and a literate culture, many country and fishing folk, in common with the majority of inhabitants of Portree and Strath, would have remained predominantly within a Gaelic, oral tradition. Within this tradition poetry and songs in their native tongue, employed in work or leisure environments, plus associated local customs, would have spoken to them directly and could be considered as possible factors influencing reaction to religious attitudes, practices and beliefs either already existing in or beginning to permeate their communities. Consequently, it is appropriate at this

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<sup>445</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.197.

<sup>446</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1983), p.187.

<sup>447</sup> Sinclair, Catherine (1841), p.204; Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), p.58.

stage to undertake a brief examination of these aspects of life in the parishes in order to see if there is any evidence of changes which could be associated with specific responses to the Disruption in the individual parishes.

Music and also dancing were significant aspects of Highland culture, seeming to come from the very soul of the people. That this could also be very localised, interpreting feelings and events relating to a limited area, is identified by Malcolm MacFarlane, albeit somewhat scathingly.<sup>448</sup> However, this 'folk' music did indeed express emotional ideas in a fashion appropriate to the culture in which it flourished, using tunes, rhythms and metres, as well as words, which fitted the linguistic background. Highland folk would sing as they worked or undertook daily tasks, music being for them 'an Ceol nach stad airson biadh no cadal' and demonstrating that 'the spirit world was very real' to them. The contention that the Church's attitude 'ground the musical soul out of the people'<sup>449</sup> will be addressed, in the sense that evangelicalism was seen as condemnatory of music, dancing, festivals and other secular customs or beliefs which threatened to divert the individual from concentrating on the path to salvation.

### **Tain.**

The country areas of Tain at least may well have retained some of the Gaelic musical traditions, but no evidence of this was uncovered during the research process. In the town itself traces of English or foreign influence had arrived by the 1820s, including classes teaching dancing as practised in London and Paris,<sup>450</sup> although both the attitude of the church to such an intrusion and also the numbers attending remain undisclosed.

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<sup>448</sup> MacFarlane, Malcolm (1925), pp.263-264.

<sup>449</sup> Galbraith, Dr.J.J. (1930), pp.298-317.

<sup>450</sup> Inverness Courier, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1825.



As regards social customs, the NSA, referring to the local fairs which took place at Midsummer, Lammas and Michaelmas, comments that they had declined in importance in recent times, the area served having shrunk to the immediate hinterland. Undoubtedly affected by evangelical morals, the report affirms that their decline 'is a matter of gratification to every sober-minded individual, since they used formerly to be, and to some extent still are, scenes of abominable drunkenness and riot.' On the subject of alcohol, the authorities, by restricting the number of inns and alehouses, had diminished its share in the leisure activities of the local inhabitants.<sup>451</sup> Seemingly the church had been wielding its influence in this sphere.

However, another source claims that, despite the declining economic significance of the fairs and markets, the 'lower classes' still enjoyed their social function, this 'festival atmosphere' being the only means of keeping 'some fairs alive' by the 1830s.<sup>452</sup> Consequently, it would seem that intoxication rather than jollity had been restrained by the religious authorities, the fairs seemingly still occurring in 1865, being referred to at that date in the Free Church School Log Book.<sup>453</sup>

However, Cameron, writing in 1841, almost entirely dismisses leisure activity, regarding 'cessation of labour' as the only recreation remaining, 'amusements or games of every kind' having 'almost disappeared' among adults.<sup>454</sup> The reasons behind their seeming disappearance remain undisclosed. Although evangelical religious disapproval could well have played a part, nevertheless it must be added that the wealthy minority in Tain attended fashionable events including balls and functions associated with the Masonic Lodge.

As regards festivals, references to festivities associated with the rites of passage are largely conspicuous by their absence. The most significant root cause may well be the various

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<sup>451</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.299 and 300.

<sup>452</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), pp.66-67.

<sup>453</sup> Log Book – Tain Free Church Congregational School, p.60.

<sup>454</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), p.3.

agendas of the writers, although chance or a diminution in the level of attendant jollification should not be ruled out. The sole allusion to weddings, christenings and funerals discovered in the sources is embedded in a discussion about the diet of the labouring classes, 'flesh or fowl' only being consumed by them at dinners on these occasions, or on New Year's Day.<sup>455</sup>

New Year's Day, seemingly the only non-religious 'festival' enjoyed by the populace, is noted as the only regular holiday through the year.<sup>456</sup> The fact that this festival was a rumbustious event and continued to be so after the Disruption is reflected in a newspaper cutting of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1860, the report describing the involvement of the Sabbath School Ragged Class. The whole event had an altogether 'very gay and lively aspect.' However, the severely moralistic sense of the reporter bemoans the rowdiness and drinking that occurred later in the day, worse than for several years past despite the considerable efforts to 'eradicate this evil.'<sup>457</sup> As with fairs, contrary to popular and 'received' conceptions, it was seemingly the abuses caused by excessive intoxication which were deplored in this evangelically dominated parish, not liveliness and jollity.

### **The Skye Parishes.**

The interplay between evangelical religion and Skye musical traditions and customs is tricky to determine, partly due to the bias of writers but also because often no differentiation is made between the various districts. This caveat requires to be borne in mind, particularly when considering the frequently quoted assertion that evangelicalism may have had a dampening effect upon such traditions.

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<sup>455</sup> Robertson, A.G.R. (n.d. but post-1967), p.105.

<sup>456</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), p.3.

<sup>457</sup> Scrapbook of Mary Ferguson,



### Portree.

The significance of music to the ordinary folk of Skye was considerable, as suggested earlier, being an integral part of their daily lives and indeed revealing the very fibre of their existence. Songs, creating cheerfulness, accompanied every work action able to be regularly timed, although the actual strains did not necessarily have much meaning of themselves.<sup>458</sup>

The persistence of such music in Portree throughout the period of this investigation cannot be determined with any certainty due to lack of unequivocal evidence, although Nicolson makes a generalised statement that a change, 'wrought by the revivals,' was on the way.<sup>459</sup> Two other observations would tend to corroborate this impression. Firstly, there is the strong tradition that Donald Munro, the blind fiddler, threw away or burned his instrument after his conversion to evangelicalism. Secondly, a later Free Church minister of Portree, MacRae, bemoans such indulgences at funerals as playing bagpipes and singing songs.<sup>460</sup> However, the relationship between attitudes to traditional music and acceptance of evangelical tenets is complex, the place of causality being indeterminable. Such commonly acknowledged, but debateable, dampening of traditional customs by the evangelicalism which spread through the parish of Portree can be seen in relation to markets and social functions.

Markets were significant in this parish, being held at Portree and Sligachan. The travellers Mitchell and Smith, in different decades of the early to mid-nineteenth century, note that the inns were well patronised at such times.<sup>461</sup> These markets were undoubtedly social occasions, as had been the custom for generations. A later Free Church minister alludes to them in his diatribe bewailing the utilisation of church gatherings on the Sabbath for 'business and

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<sup>458</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), pp.46 and 49.

<sup>459</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.272.

<sup>460</sup> MacRae, the Reverend Alexander (n.d.), p.67.

<sup>461</sup> Mitchell, Joseph (1971), pp.218-219; Smith, Alexander (n.d.), p.311.

pleasure,' which he compares to the activities of market days.<sup>462</sup> Although such views in relation to religious ceremonies are reminiscent of Christ berating the traders in the temple and as such seemingly unchallengeable, as in Tain there appear to be overtones of disapproval of any display of merriment during social gatherings. Where evangelical religion was strong, or there was a commitment to see it implanted, seemingly such an attitude to customary social events also existed, although how this related to the innate feelings of Portree inhabitants can only be conjectured, due to lack of definitive evidence. Markets themselves certainly continued at Portree in the post-Disruption period, being recorded in the late 1840s and early 1850s.<sup>463</sup>

The same comments regarding lack of evidence about festivities associated with rites of passage in Tain could equally well be applied to Portree. Indeed, the sources trawled have not even disclosed any specific information concerning possible celebrations at New Year. However, it could be realistically postulated that chance has played a significant part, as numerous references to such festivals in Strath have been uncovered and despite possible evangelical dampening of celebrations it seems unlikely that all the customs noted in Strath had completely disappeared from Portree by 1843. Additionally, Nicolson describes festivities in Skye, such as feasting and other indulgences associated with weddings and funerals, without identifying particular locations. He contends, for example, that wedding ceremonies in Skye became much more restricted generally for several years before the Disruption, due to the influence of evangelical revivals.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Macrae, the Reverend Alexander (n.d.), p.67.

<sup>463</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), p.62; Raasay House Weather Tables.

<sup>464</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.272-273.



## Strath.

Lamont maintains that the notion of accompanying all work with song had descended to the people from the time of Columba, as had the associated attitude of sinless joy and laughter.<sup>465</sup>

Another traveller, visiting Strath in the late eighteenth century, noted this in relation to such tasks as the *luagh* or 'walking' of the cloth and the cutting of corn. The songs, generally characterised by 'slow and melancholy' tunes, were 'often a rehearsal of the deeds of the ancient heroes.'<sup>466</sup>

After work, the ceilidh house (home of a township resident) formed the popular venue for relaxation, much respect being given to those who could recite old heroic tales or poems. The singing of traditional airs and dancing were favoured activities, the custom still persisting in Strath into the early nineteenth century.<sup>467</sup>

The singing of Gaelic songs in the homes of the tacksmen or larger tenants was observed by the traveller, Atkinson, visiting MacKinnon of Corry in June, 1831.<sup>468</sup> Local dialect was employed, emphasising the significance of communicating in a way that would be understood by parochial listeners, a point to be raised in relation to the preaching of ministers.

As regards markets and social festivities, more material has been unearthed relating to Strath than to Portree, much of which would have been equally applicable to the latter parish, although the effects of adopting evangelical religion in the latter parish may well have caused changes, alluded to above, which did not hit Strath at that time.

The fairs or markets of Strath took place in Broadford and remained significant social occasions for local inhabitants.<sup>469</sup> Two mid-nineteenth century travellers report on the fairs,

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<sup>465</sup> Lamont, the Reverend D. (1984), pp.127-128.

<sup>466</sup> Pennant, Thomas (1998), pp.284-285.

<sup>467</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.218 and 272.

<sup>468</sup> Quine, David A., ed. (2001), pp.xxii and 98-99.

<sup>469</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), (1981), p.194.

clearly illustrating their liveliness. Geikie maintains they furnished the 'best opportunity of seeing the whole crofter population' of the district, folk from 'far and near' attending these picturesque occasions.<sup>470</sup> Smith affirms that the markets, occurring four times a year, acted as the local man's 'exchange, his family gathering, and his newspaper,' both men and women being involved.<sup>471</sup> These cheery events reflected a warm, happy attitude to life and underlined the significance of social encounter.

This same sense of coming together and sharing traditions existed in the ceilidh house, referred to earlier in connection with music. Neil MacKinnon contends that the entertainment in the ceilidh house was merely a by-product of its essential role as a centre for social contact, although the story telling, of traditions and folklore, was an integral part of the popular culture.<sup>472</sup> As folk possessed a thirst for knowledge, gatherings would have an educational flavour, views being exchanged and stories sometimes having a moral theme, highly significant in areas remote from the church. Entertainment in Strath, he maintained, tended to remain more traditional than in northern Skye, due to the weaker influence of evangelical revivals.<sup>473</sup>

Opinions differ between writers as to how much these revivals affected social gatherings and customs, again principally due to the fact that some authors are considering the island in general rather than one specific parish. However, folk wishing to influence their township neighbours in any way whatsoever, including spreading an evangelical message, could have harnessed ceilidh house gatherings to that aim. Consequently, the impact of this customary social occasion on reactions to events like the Disruption should not be underestimated.

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<sup>470</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.232-233.

<sup>471</sup> Smith, Alexander (n.d.), pp.138 and 145.

<sup>472</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1987), pp.208-209.

<sup>473</sup> Interview with Neil MacKinnon, September 2000.



Cheerfulness and friendliness in social gatherings generally persisted into the early nineteenth century, harvest homes, for example, being accompanied by much celebration, festivity and mirth.<sup>474</sup> Halloween (*Oidche Shamhna*) and New Year's Eve (*Oidhche Chullaig*) were much enjoyed by the children, who would recite verses and receive hospitality at neighbouring houses. However, Nicolson asserts that the revivals led to a ban on the 'playing of musical instruments, the singing of secular songs and the telling of ancient tales' (seen as a threat to the Christian message), only religious gatherings being approved. Waulking songs, athletic contests and shinty games were virtually discontinued. Nevertheless he adds that this situation was most marked in Trotternish, Bracadale and Duirinish, confirming the opinion that attitudes in Strath were less rigorous,<sup>475</sup> Neil MacKinnon concurring with this viewpoint.<sup>476</sup> On New Year's Day the most important shinty match of the year would take place between the young men of each township, shinty being a popular outdoor sport in the locality.<sup>477</sup> Like the ceilidh house, this event would help to emphasise specific township identities. As intimated in an earlier section, with reference to Tain, individual communities existing within the broader framework of each parish may well have exhibited characteristics contributing to differential reactions to beliefs and events.

As MacKinnon observes, much celebration remained in Strath,<sup>478</sup> which was less affected by evangelical revivals than northern Skye. Weddings and funerals, as recorded by travellers such as Catherine Sinclair or Geikie,<sup>479</sup> retained a greater sense of liveliness for longer than it would appear to have been the case in areas of Skye under the influence of evangelical religion.

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<sup>474</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), p.36.

<sup>475</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.272.

<sup>476</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.185.

<sup>477</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1983), p.181.

<sup>478</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), p.36.

<sup>479</sup> Sinclair, Catherine (1841), pp.234-235; Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.330-331.

Although differences have been observed between festive observations in specific localities, relationship with evangelicalism can only be inferred rather than definitively stated. The influence of the church was seemingly overt in Tain, its impact recorded in the press, whereas in Skye evangelical revivals seem to have affected celebrations in the north, general gaiety persisting longer in Strath. However, it should also be noted that the exuberance of these events could have been affected by local personality characteristics and beliefs as well as the impact of economic distress in Skye during the pre-Disruption decades.

Personality characteristics and beliefs could also have influenced reactions to religious movements in different localities and thus affected Responses to the Disruption. Such elements, interacting with other facets of the broad cultural milieu and the unique circumstances accruing in each parish, could have shaped parishioners' reaction both to religious attitudes and also to events like the Disruption. Indeed, there has been a tradition in writings on the Disruption to focus on the character of the people. Consequently, specific character features and possible differentials between parishes, as perceived by others, will be examined at this stage, in tandem with traditional beliefs.

### **Perceptions of Character, Incorporating Beliefs.**

Many beliefs about figures like fairies or witches, plus superstitions and the possession of mystical characteristics, such as second sight or the evil eye, were common throughout the Highlands during the period under investigation. However, local variants occurred and differential persistence of regard for these phenomena. While studying the material concerning the parishes under investigation, an attempt will be made to distinguish interactions between religious attitudes and traditional secular beliefs. The close relationship and interplay between



these beliefs, local characteristics and an overall spirituality in the parishes is acknowledged, but the religious aspects of this essential ingredient of life will be explored in a later chapter.

### **Tain.**

Although Tain is topographically lowland, Robertson contends that exposure to attack from the nearby hills or the sea meant historically that 'constant danger bred a tough and tenacious people,' essentially Highland in character. Consequently, they adhered to the Celtic law and clanship system, following the chief as head of their race, rather than as tenants or retainers.<sup>480</sup>

Several sources paint different aspects of local character in the period under investigation, reflecting their own viewpoints, agendas and audiences.

The NSA, although penned by another, undoubtedly witnessed some participation from the minister, as was the common practice across Scotland. Loyalty and obedience are registered and a striking tendency for religion to set the tone for their behaviour, partly inherited but partly also believed to be ascribable to 'the genuine workings of a living power, actuating individual minds, and thro' them leavening society in the mass.'<sup>481</sup> The overarching significance of religion, whether imposed from without by influential figures such as the minister and his elders or arising from an internal well of spirituality, is unquestionable.

Cameron, however, in his contemporaneous report, seemingly displays a lower regard for the habits and character of local people, although his very different remit and audience must be acknowledged. The Poor Law Commissioners would require to be informed why poverty and inadequate domestic and working conditions existed. The 'laziness and waywardness' imputed to the former 'unmodified highlander' (probably the local populace before being subject to influences from the south) seems to have lessened and 'enterprise and habits of steady industry' correspondingly increased. However, Cameron, a Tain man, regrets the diminution

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<sup>480</sup> Robertson, Allan G.R. (n.d. but post-1967), pp.9-10.

<sup>481</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.293.

of the former 'free and serenely joyous spirit,' although applauding the continuing existence of the ancient tradition of hospitality.<sup>482</sup> Did cultural as well as economic and religious influences create these perceived changes, imbuing parishioners with attributes more Lowland than those distinguished in the typically 'Highland' parishes in Skye?

Cameron continues by observing that the labouring classes possessed an independent bearing, 'simple and naturally polite' manners, a 'proper sense of personal dignity' and a tendency to be 'keenly alive to either injury or kindness.' Petty theft and lying appear to have been the 'principal immoralities', stealing seemingly associated partly with an 'imperfect understanding of English' and partly from a 'love of what is novel....' Whisky drinking and intoxication in general (apart from during fairs and on occasions of 'special festivity') had declined, partly due to vigilance by the magistrates, and perhaps partly due to the establishment of a teetotal society in the town, which was well supported. With crime and the 'grosser immoralities' being 'uncommon' and religious morals significant, Cameron feels confident in asserting that 'the morals of the lower classes are superior to those of the same rank in most other places.'

He refers separately to fisher folk, whose number included the inhabitants of Inver. Affirming that their morals were 'not below those of any class of the community', he observes 'a certain feudal spirit, or *pride of order*, which tends to preserve them as a *separate* community, and to promote concord among themselves.'<sup>483</sup> This observation emphasises the importance of recognising and acknowledging the different and disparate communities incorporated within the larger body of the parish. Their interactions, or lack of interactions, should form part of the exploration into Responses to the Disruption.

Continuing the notion of differentials within the parish, a report in the Inverness Courier of 1<sup>st</sup> February 1843 implies that superstition was more persistent in the country than in the town.

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<sup>482</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp.3 and 5.

<sup>483</sup> Cameron, James Esq., Surgeon (1841), pp.5, 7 and 15.



Villagers refused to be the first to 'touch the body of a woman found drowned in a well, as they supposed it was a case of suicide,' despite strong evidence that a fit had caused her to fall into the water. An initial proposal, later rejected, was that a live dog should be thrown on the body. However, once the distressed husband removed the body 'they put it into a chest or box, and the same evening carried it some miles to the seashore and buried it deep in the sand.' The town authorities, however, seemingly unaffected by superstition, 'caused the body to be disinterred and gave it a decent burial in the burying-ground of St. Duthus Chapel.' Whether better education, external influences or the attitude of the church (perhaps more closely in touch with townspeople than with the country folk) had slackened the hold of superstition within the burgh cannot be determined without definitive evidence.

Again, in contrast to the burgh, old beliefs also persisted in local fishing villages, including Inver. For example, superstitions associated with marriage festivities are recorded.<sup>484</sup> Nevertheless, some beliefs, such as those concerning mysterious cures, according to the Munros, were common, the possession of second sight, 'with its uncomfortable 'gift' of being able to foretell death and disaster'<sup>485</sup> not being confined to any specifically identifiable sector of the community.

### **Portree.**

Again, as acknowledged in reference to Tain, the perspectives of writers reflect their own prejudices, agendas and audiences. None can furnish a definitive picture of the internal perspective of the parishioners themselves. Inferences can be taken from the views of others, whether local or from elsewhere, and from deliberations on beliefs and customs, coupled with the low level of crime and absence of noted belligerence, antipathy or rudeness. Nicolson considers that the 'standard of morality' during the early nineteenth century was generally a

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<sup>484</sup> Macgregor, Alexander (1951), pp.51-52.

<sup>485</sup> Munro, R.W. and Munro, Jean (1966), p.116.

‘high one’, the people being ‘peaceable and law-abiding.’ Indeed the non-local minister’s report of 1841 affirms that the influence of ‘moral principles’ was so powerful that ‘heinous crimes’ were virtually non-existent.<sup>486</sup>

Travellers comment on the character, habits and attitudes of both the proprietors and the mass of the population. Cooper quotes an 1811 guide-book, for example, claiming that the local inhabitants were ‘sober, hospitable and peaceable’ and the 1820 Lumsden and Son’s *Steam-Boat Companion* assertion that the ‘natives of these regions are hospitable, intelligent and polite, the gentlemen being distinguished for their urbanity, the ease of manners and the vivacity of their conversation.’<sup>487</sup>

The locally bred Alexander Campbell, then schoolteacher and later parish minister, makes several significant observations in his submission to the OSA. Recognising their hospitality and caring, he affirms the parishioners to be ‘as humanely and generously disposed as any of their neighbours.’ Regarding intelligence, they ‘are naturally endowed with a strength of mind and sprightliness of disposition that greatly distinguish them from others of the same rank and condition.’ His final observations are indeed intriguing: ‘their inquisitive turn, and fondness for news, frequently induce them to address all they see for information; and their questions, and shrewd remarks, are often very surprising.’ He witnesses this most conspicuously in Portree,<sup>488</sup> the village probably affording more opportunities for interaction with others than the small townships elsewhere in the parish. This contention of differential opportunities for inter-relating with others, similarly observed in Tain, may have become less significant to the research questions in the immediate pre-Disruption decades, as evangelical laymen penetrated further into the district, drawing crowds from numerous outlying parts.

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<sup>486</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.255.

<sup>487</sup> Cooper, Derek (1979), pp.57-58.

<sup>488</sup> Sinclair, Sir John (1795), p.160.



Coll Macdonald, minister in 1841, also comments on the character of his parishioners, re-emphasising their good neighbourliness in his assertion that they were 'charitable to the poor, and hospitable to strangers,' as well as maintaining that they 'are attached to their superiors – obedient to the laws – dutiful and loyal to their sovereign.'<sup>489</sup> These last attributes were seemingly not destined to change until the later years of the century and may have contributed significantly to their desire to follow leaders offering a hope of salvation in the world to come. One observable change, however, was that, even in the more remote areas of the parish, where education was unavailable, 'profane swearing, intemperance, drunkenness, and the desecration of the Sabbath, are not so common as they were twenty or thirty years ago.'<sup>490</sup> The enthusiastic preaching of evangelical missionaries may well have contributed to this alteration. As regards superstitious beliefs, although these persisted in Tain, particularly among country and fisher folk, their strength was seemingly waning in the town. However, in Portree a superstitiousness, long-ingrained, still prevailed across the parish. Indeed, although he could be accused of distinctive bias, there is undoubtedly a strong core of truth in the later Free Church minister's statement that 'at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,' Skye was 'peopled by witches, fairies and ghosts.'<sup>491</sup> Although many references uncovered for the parish refer to Raasay, there is evidence that the Skye section also continued to embrace such ideas. For example, at an unspecified period in the nineteenth century, three "witches" in the Braes apparently caused the sinking of a boat coming from Raasay.<sup>492</sup> Additionally, second sight can be discerned in the case of the aged woman, living to the north of Portree, who was observed

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<sup>489</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.225-226.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.233-234.

<sup>491</sup> Macrae, the Reverend Alexander (n.d.), p.67.

<sup>492</sup> Cooper, Derek (1970), p.145.

‘sighing and lamenting the catastrophe’ of the sinking of a boat returning from market, with the consequent drowning of its occupants. She was ignored but the disaster occurred.<sup>493</sup>

With regard to Raasay, Sharpe asserts that life for its people ‘was certainly primitive,’ a strong belief existing in such supernatural phenomena as second-sight and witchcraft.<sup>494</sup> As most inhabitants would have had scanty communication with the ‘outside world’ during the period being studied, little opportunity would have occurred, outwith the pulpit, for such notions to be scorned or vehemently criticised (in contrast to the situation in the burgh of Tain). Weird creatures, such as the sea-beast in Loch na Mna on the island, reputed to have ‘devoured a man’s daughter,’<sup>495</sup> and legendary heroes<sup>496</sup> formed part of the belief system.

It is possible that the belief in mystical beings and mysterious aptitudes or happenings, reflecting an understanding of the existence of a world apart from that perceived with the eyes, could have been appropriately harnessed and diverted into other channels by evangelists in Portree parish who were either local or conversant with local beliefs.

### **Strath.**

Regarding the character, manners and morals of Strath inhabitants, a number of similarities to the Portree picture can be distinguished, as well as some attributes noted in Tain. In the late eighteenth century, the virtues of hospitality, helpfulness to those in distress and a natural politeness and bearing were recorded.<sup>497</sup> MacDermid asserts that the former two characteristics persisted throughout the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>498</sup> a number of sources certainly confirming the significance of hospitality. The tacksman family of Mackinnon at Corrichatichan continued the tradition for many generations, Pennant, Johnson

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<sup>493</sup> Macgregor, Alexander (1951), pp.38-39.

<sup>494</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), pp.51-52.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.(1978), p.55.

<sup>496</sup> Maclean, Dr. Sam (1976), pp.384-385.

<sup>497</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), pp.211-212.

<sup>498</sup> MacDermid, Gordon E. (1967), p.187.



and Boswell experiencing it in the 1770s, Mitchell in the early nineteenth century, Atkinson in 1831 and Catherine Sinclair in the late 1830s.<sup>499</sup> The warmth of reception at the manse is applauded by Geikie in the mid-nineteenth century and later he was welcomed at the more lowly property of the small tenant on the island of Pabay,<sup>500</sup> demonstrating that hospitality was not confined to those living in more material comfort. Strath's minister, John Mackinnon, indeed particularly noted the hospitality and tenderness of his parishioners, attributes which he appears to have shared, having been born and bred in the same parish.

The general level of morality was high, the minister also noting other positive characteristics prevailing, including obedience and respectfulness to superiors and 'sober and correct habits.'<sup>501</sup> Parishioners were perceived as 'lively and active,'<sup>502</sup> although an 'antipathy towards innovation' was identified by a surveyor employed by Lord Macdonald in 1799.<sup>503</sup> Despite reflecting associated agendas, this observation may well reveal a significant trait of conservatism stemming from a fear of change imposed from above.

However, Neil MacKinnon asserts that an altered outlook gradually hit the parish, a gloom descending as well as a 'moral reformation in habits,' due to factors such as 'congestion, lack of employment and poverty' as well as the influence of evangelical teachers.<sup>504</sup> However, the timing of these mid-century changes is somewhat vague and may have post-dated the Disruption, so should be treated with caution, as the general impression revealed in connection with social customs will be seen to suggest that conviviality was still very much in evidence in the parish. As the nineteenth century progressed, Neil MacKinnon claims that passivity remained, attributable partially to the 'former long-established system of clanship,' and

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<sup>499</sup> Pennant, Thomas (1998), p.284; Gordon, Seton (1949), p.82; Mitchell, Joseph (1971), pp.210-211; Quine, David, ed. (2001), p.98; Sinclair, Catherine (1841), p.203.

<sup>500</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.57-58 and 397-399.

<sup>501</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.308-309.

<sup>502</sup> Lamont, the Reverend D. (1984), p.129.

<sup>503</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221/13.39.

<sup>504</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), pp.184-185.

partially to the fact that movements of public opinion elsewhere largely bypassed the mainly monoglot Gaelic speakers. Still conservative in 'social attitudes,' they were tolerant of the eccentric behaviour of the originals (this was witnessed in Portree also) and retained a sense of pride and hardiness.<sup>505</sup>

Despite some similarities in perceived characteristics, in particular with its neighbour, Portree, there appears to have been a core difference in attitude towards superstitious beliefs. As in Portree, there were a number of persistent superstitions, Geikie providing several examples, although constantly referring to fairies in the past. Fairies, he maintains, 'once formed an active and important community among the population of Strath.' Legendary creatures were recognised. A single live trout was believed to have inhabited the same spring or well near the house of Kilbride, where the minister resided, for over two hundred years, its existence indeed being confirmed by the minister. More threatening were the fabled water-horse (*Each Uisge*) and water-bull (*Tarbh Uisge*). Although no witnesses existed, even sensible folk appeared to believe in them.<sup>506</sup>

Superstitions concerning the timing of customary occupations were rife, even being present in the 'houses of intelligent people.' At the manse of Kilbride, butter would not be made at a 'certain state of the moon' and peats only cut 'when the moon was on the wane.' The 'prejudice' against the sow as an unclean animal was also evidenced at Kilbride. No pigs were kept and no ham, pork or bacon consumed.<sup>507</sup> It is highly significant that these superstitions were present in the manse, seemingly demonstrating that in Strath the Church, exemplified in the person of the minister, merely absorbed Christianity into the wider belief structure existing

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid. (1983), pp.185-6 and 183.

<sup>506</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.108-109, 110 and 113.

<sup>507</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), pp.113-114.



in the parish, ignoring any threat which evangelicals may have perceived to a core belief in the grace of the Lord.

The persistence or otherwise of superstitious beliefs in the early nineteenth century, whether restricted to Strath or more widespread on the island, is a source of much polemic. Neil MacKinnon contends that ancient beliefs and practices were being eroded as evangelical ideas spread, traditional practices, such as those relating to a 'knowledge of genealogy, clan lore and *sgeulachdan*,' gradually disappearing, the *sgeulachdan* (folk stories) being regarded by the evangelicals as 'idle tales' and 'rival influences' to their own message<sup>508</sup> However, Nicolson asserts that superstitious and irrational beliefs persisted even into the mid-nineteenth century. These included faith in the 'power of the moon to shape events' and belief in witchcraft, fairies, second sight and the 'evil eye.'<sup>509</sup> It should also be remarked that the observations of Geikie and Smith, outlined above, belong to the middle decades of the century!

An externally held belief in the value of Highland scenery, reflecting the Romantic Movement then in vogue, led to an increase in the number of travellers visiting Strath in the early nineteenth century.<sup>510</sup> This could well have gradually affected the belief system of the local inhabitants, especially those in the less remote districts. It has already been hypothesised that the seeming erosion of traditional superstitiousness in the burgh of Tain could have been related to its accessibility to ideas and visitors from further afield. Change, however, would have been slower in the western island of Skye, where Smith maintains that climate and the natural phenomena of the mountains had shaped the imagination.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979) and (1981), pp.36 and 185.

<sup>509</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.273.

<sup>510</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.173.

<sup>511</sup> Smith, Alexander (n.d.), p.178.

**Summary.**

This chapter has explored the various cultural elements which formed part of the life experiences of parishioners, concentrating particularly on education as well as indicating the significance of language, as both these facets had considerable interplay with religious attitudes, practices and events. On the other hand, although it would appear that attitudes towards, and the continuing or disrupted practice of, traditional customs and beliefs did reflect in some measure the spread of evangelical religion, the issue of causality is complex and requires other attendant factors in the individual communities to be taken into account. Perceived characteristics of the parishioners could not provide sufficient explanation for Disruption reaction on their own, as considerable overlap of attributes has been detected, particularly between Portree and Strath, whose inhabitants displayed markedly contrasting reactions to the Disruption.

The ensuing chapters will address the various elements of the religious environment, commencing with history, the role of other denominations and physical settings for worship, then moving on to people of influence within the sphere of the Church. The specific area of spirituality, part of the broader field of belief systems explored in this chapter, will be investigated later, followed by an examination of the impact of revivals. A final issue, that of the networks and kinship of ministers, will bring the examination of influences on parishioners' lives, central to the research thrust of this thesis, to a close. Throughout the chapters differential experiences between the parishes will again be explored, in an attempt to discover further contributory elements affecting Responses to the Disruption.



## **CHAPTER 5. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND.**

### **HISTORY, OTHER DENOMINATIONS AND PHYSICAL SETTINGS FOR WORSHIP.**

Having now obtained an impression of the socio-economic and cultural factors that may have influenced reaction of parishioners in the three communities, it is apposite to delve into their religious background. This not only provides manifest and direct clues to Disruption reaction, but also it has been affirmed that ‘religious experience’ has ‘deeply influenced’ the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and ‘the churches have helped to shape the intellectual, social, and moral perspectives of the region.’<sup>512</sup> Ensuing chapters will endeavour to demonstrate that these latter perspectives have themselves exerted an influence on attitudes to religious observance.

A brief history of worship in the three parishes prior to the pre-Disruption decades will serve to set the scene for the dissimilar experiences of that period, the following section acknowledging the part that other Christian denominations may have played in the pre-Disruption environment. Finally, the geographical and physical settings for ordinances will be investigated, as their influence on patterns of worship should not be underestimated. Recognising that ‘Highland church history is full of unexplained areas and forgotten themes’<sup>513</sup> and consequently gaps in source material hinder attempts to paint an equally clear picture of the various aspects of the subject in each parish, nonetheless the comparative aspect will retain its position of paramount importance.

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<sup>512</sup> Meek, Donald E. (2001), p.521.

<sup>513</sup> Meek, Donald E. (1988-1990), p.269.

### **Religious History of the Parishes.**

The centrality of the church and its significant influence on the lives of people during the centuries and decades prior to the Disruption are unequivocal. In that key year an observer reports from Tain; ‘‘The Church’’ seems to be a common subject of talk among all classes, as it is in many other places.’<sup>514</sup> However, the nature of the influence and the impact of specific religious movements varied across the Highlands, the three parishes under investigation displaying this very clearly.

#### **Tain.**

Two observers highlight the long-established evangelical ministry in the area. MacRae asserts that this appeared in the Synod of Moray and Ross at the Reformation, many parishes experiencing an unbroken chain of such worship. Consequently, before the nineteenth century, the religious history of this area was somewhat dissimilar to that in most other Highland areas.<sup>515</sup> Narrowing the field a little further, Bain employs more emotive language to affirm that Ross saw the most complete ‘Reformation from Popery’ in the North and almost as complete a one from the second Reformation, ‘that from Court Religion, or Episcopacy.’ He further contends that the continuing adherence of the gentry to Episcopalianism drove an even wider wedge between them and the common folk than was already in existence, this factor notably predating the decline of the clan system.<sup>516</sup>

Taylor narrows the field even further, to the lands between the Beauly and Dornoch Firths, a district, of which Tain forms a part, ‘distinguished from the greater part of the Highlands by its physical character and its exceptional fertility.’ This contrast with the Skye parishes was noted in an earlier chapter. However, there is a historical distinction in that the area had ‘much

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<sup>514</sup> Inverness Courier, June 7, 1843.

<sup>515</sup> MacRae, the Reverend Alexander (n.d.), p.95.

<sup>516</sup> Bain, Robert (1899), p.396.



earlier intercourse and sympathy with the South,' an intercourse resulting in the development of bilingualism, enabling southern influences to infiltrate more readily. Such influences included dynastic sympathies, such as that for the Orange and Hanoverian governments rather than 'the pretensions of the Stuarts.' Taylor carries the argument into the religious realm by affirming, in like manner to MacRae and Bain, the 'earlier prevalence' in the district 'of a decided Presbyterianism and evangelical religion,' which 'gradually spread into the Northern Highlands.'

Pinpointing Tain itself, Taylor considers it the first place 'north of the Grampians' to have embraced Reformation doctrine, the Regent Moray presenting an oaken pulpit to the burgh 'in testimony of their zeal in the cause of the Reformation.' A prominent local chief, Munro of Foulis, espoused the cause of Protestantism at an early stage, exerting considerable local influence and furnishing from his family many 'zealous Protestant ministers and laymen.' In the early seventeenth century, Munro headed a regiment of local men in support of the army of Gustavus Adolphus, aiding the Protestants of Germany in 'their fearful struggle for toleration.' This army contained many pious souls, the survivors of the conflicts returning to their native soil with 'intensified Protestant zeal.'<sup>517</sup> Coming into contact at that time with Puritan clergy, expelled from England, they imbibed a puritanism which returned to Ross-shire with them.

During the persecution of Presbyterian clergy in the late seventeenth century, although Ross-shire was remote from the aggression launched against Covenanters in the South, nonetheless sympathising clerics were ousted from their pulpits and ran the risk of imprisonment or exile. However, landowners such as Ross of Balnagown and Munro were protective, and preaching of notable men like Thomas Hog, born in Tain and minister of nearby Kiltarn, continued,

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<sup>517</sup> Taylor, the Reverend William (1871), pp.3-5 and 7.

despite spells of incarceration and banishment.<sup>518</sup> Consequently, an evangelical Protestantism survived in the area until the reinstatement of such clerics at the 'Glorious Revolution.' From then onwards a series of 'eminent ministers' kept the 'light of the Gospel' burning until the appearance of the 'worthies' of the Disruption period.<sup>519</sup>

Taylor asserts that Easter Ross's powerful body of evangelical ministers was able to make a strong, if intermittently unsuccessful, stand against "moderate" influence enforced from without by the re-imposition of patronage.<sup>520</sup> Tain appears to have been well served in this respect, an undoubtedly evangelical report maintaining that, following the final disappearance of Episcopalianism, the parish had been blessed with a 'succession of pious clergymen,' remembered with affection by many of the local population, who had thus been led to a 'zealous attachment' to the Church of Scotland and, possibly for the same reason, to a 'disinclination to revolutionary or republican sentiments.'<sup>521</sup>

From the mid-eighteenth century evangelical revivals hit the area, undoubtedly impacting upon the populace. However, it is already apparent that Tain was firmly embedded in a district with a long tradition of evangelical Presbyterianism, open to influences from both the south and the continent. That such influences predated the Reformation can be inferred from its position as a centre of pilgrimage to St. Duthach, born in Tain in the eleventh century and renowned for 'learning and holiness.' Even kings, such as James IV, were among the pilgrims, and it may be that 'mistaken devotion is often more hopeful than indifference' in promoting 'religious earnestness.'<sup>522</sup> Allowing for the obvious religious bias and the anachronistic interpretation of devotion, the observation could well harbour a germ of truth.

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<sup>518</sup> Taylor, the Reverend William (1871), pp.8-9.

<sup>519</sup> Macdonald, Kenneth (1902), p.96.

<sup>520</sup> Taylor, the Reverend William (1871), pp.10-11.

<sup>521</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.291.

<sup>522</sup> Taylor, the Reverend William (1871), pp.3-4.



**Strath.**

Indifference, however, seems to have characterised religious attitudes and observance in the parish of Strath. Indeed, its history of religious observance lacks both the post-Reformation fervour detected in Tain and any notable continuity of ministry from that period. Although Presbyterianism had gained a firm foothold in Skye by the second half of the eighteenth century, certain parishes, including Strath, where Jacobitism had been strong, still contained adherents to Episcopalianism among the leading families. However, by the end of the century, the latter denomination had faded in significance and Strath, along with other parishes, did witness the lead of able, zealous and scholarly ministers.<sup>523</sup> The somewhat shaky foundation for this form of Christian worship could be attributed to Skye only possessing one minister before 1600, Strath only being settled in 1627 and the size of the parish only being rendered reasonable for spreading the message by its separation from the Small Isles in 1720.<sup>524</sup> Indeed, taking the matter further, Christianity itself seemed to affect the people very little either morally or spiritually at the Reformation or the 'Glorious Revolution.' The notion of Christianity as a 'peace-making, civilizing power' did not form part of their lives and consequently struggles between Roman Catholicism, Episcopacy and Presbyterianism were met with apathy.<sup>525</sup> It is possible that a residual apathetic attitude towards spiritual politics and the details of religious observance may have contributed towards the complex web of inter-related factors affecting reaction in 1843. Folk, whose broader understanding of the concept of spirituality, allied to a traditional superstitiousness, carried a thin veneer of Christian doctrine and practice, may well have been reluctant to become embroiled in religious argument and disturbance.

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<sup>523</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.220.

<sup>524</sup> MacDermid, Gordon E. (1967), pp.35 and 49.

<sup>525</sup> Lamont, the Reverend D. (1984), p.87.

Strath, unlike Tain, had not witnessed streams of pre-Reformation pilgrims or the attention of royalty. It was isolated from the evangelical influences which hit Ross-shire at an early stage, its insular position and inhospitable terrain precluding ready communication with other areas of Scotland or further afield. The scattered townships would tend to be not only relatively self-sufficient but also inward-looking. Consequently, those in power in the area could quite readily preclude the ministrations of evangelical missionaries.<sup>526</sup> The revivals which swept the north end of the island in the early nineteenth century tended to by-pass Strath, cut off by the physical barrier of the Cuillins as well as by the attitudes of 'Moderate' ministers and secular leaders.

#### **Portree.**

These revivals did, however, impact on the parishioners of Portree, which, as noted in the preceding chapter, was situated to the north of the Cuillins. Like Strath, Portree was part of a larger parish, the parish of Snizort, from pre-Reformation times until 1726.<sup>527</sup> Although the seventeenth century saw Episcopalianism take root in Skye, these 'early Episcopal ministers were staunch Protestants,' successfully preventing Roman Catholicism from re-establishing itself amidst Reformed Church division. Following the final re-establishment in 1690 of the full Presbyterian form of Church government in Scotland, the Snizort minister refused to take the necessary oath of allegiance, but was allowed to remain in his parish. His son, who became the first unequivocally Presbyterian minister of the parish in 1706, succeeded him. In 1726 Portree, with the islands of Raasay and Rona, was disjoined from Snizort, this new parish, with the Crown as its patron, being served by Hugh Macdonald and then John Nicolson, whose long ministry terminated in 1799, when the parish schoolmaster, Alexander Campbell,

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<sup>526</sup> MacCowan, Roderick (1902), p.202.

<sup>527</sup> Ferguson, the Reverend Dr. John, (n.d.), p.112.



became its ordained minister.<sup>528</sup> At that time 'all the people in Portree parish were Presbyterians.'<sup>529</sup>

The sources consulted have failed to flesh out this potted history of Portree's post-Reformation years with impressions of the type of ministry offered to the parishioners. However, a lack of enthusiastic mention by any of the later prolific Free Church writers is suggestive of an absence of evangelicalism and the pertinence of applying to Portree comments relating to Skye in general. MacRae, for example, alleges that 'the Reformation did not touch Skye as a Spiritual movement,' the people adopting 'the religion of their chief, or of the landed proprietors, without having any personal interest in it as the power of God unto salvation.' His claim that worship for the islanders was a slavish duty and basically shallow in nature is accompanied by a contention that 'Druidism, Romanism, and Protestantism, each contributed an element of the grotesque superstition that went under the name of religion.'<sup>530</sup> This undeniably biased viewpoint does, however, tend to suggest that influential secular figures, in similar fashion to evangelical ministers in Tain, had been affecting the behaviour of the masses in religious affairs.

Portree, like Strath, comprised scattered townships and topography inhospitable to communication. However, it underwent a different experience with regard to revivals, which will be investigated at a later stage and may furnish one of the explanations for the mass of the populace embracing the Free Church at the Disruption, without the support of their minister. Despite sharing the reaction of the people of Tain in this adherence, their religious history was noticeably dissimilar, being more akin to that of Strath prior to the early nineteenth century revivals, although the behaviour of the latter parish in 1843 was radically different. A

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<sup>528</sup> Mackinnon, the Reverend Donald (?1906), pp.15-17.

<sup>529</sup> Nicolson, Alexander (1994), p.220.

<sup>530</sup> MacRae, the Reverend Alexander (n.d.), pp.66-67.

suggestion of historical religious apathy in Strath has pinpointed a possible contributory factor, but other influential issues, including the lives, attitudes and families of the ministers, will be gradually revealed as this study progresses.

### **Other Denominations.**

The part that other denominations may have played in the pre-Disruption environment in the parishes requires addressing. Such activity appears to have been minimal, but the ensuing exploration will endeavour to discover whether it was significant. Secession Churches were founded in Tain and Portree during the years immediately prior to the Disruption, a few inhabitants of Portree parish also attending worship at an Episcopalian chapel established in the parish of Bracadale at a similar time. Broadford in Strath was the site of a Baptist Chapel, in existence from the 1820s. Thus reaction to the religious diet of the Established Church only led to overt moves away from it within two decades of the Disruption.

### **Tain.**

Little of significance has come to light regarding the Secession Church in Tain. Mowat contends that 'seat rents in the parish church persuaded some parishioners to build their own chapel in 1836, with assistance from the United Associate Synod.'<sup>531</sup> The inference is that seat rents, non-existent in the pre-1815 church, were too high. On 28th November 1838 the Inverness Courier records that 'a Secession Chapel was in course of erection at Tain,' affirming that the heritors in the Parish Church were a precipitating factor (although their actual role in this matter is not indicated).<sup>532</sup> Beaton merely states that the former Secession Church dates from 1839.<sup>533</sup> Prior to this date only a few families attended a Secession Chapel

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<sup>531</sup> Mowat, Ian R.M. (1981), p.121 (quoting Mackelvie, W., Annals of the United Presbyterian Church, p.261).

<sup>532</sup> Barron, James (1907), p.238.

<sup>533</sup> Beaton, Elizabeth (1989), p.46.



in a nearby parish, the Established Church being the principal focus for worship. As far as can be elicited from available sources, reasons for the Secession appear to be related to economics and local politics, although the absence of evidence for spiritual factors, such as worship patterns, theological content of preaching or attitudes to conversion, should not be regarded as conclusive. Although information about numbers defecting to this Chapel or continuing to support it after the Disruption is lacking, it could be implied from the overwhelming support for the parish's evangelical minister that these numbers were not high, but again this remains within the realms of conjecture.

### **Portree.**

Research into the development of the United Secession Church in Portree has proved a little more fruitful. A union of Secession Churches founded in the eighteenth century, the church was presbyterian in organisation and doctrine although detached from any state involvement, a position termed 'voluntary.' Opening its first mission in the village in 1840, it faced several difficulties. Preachers sent to support it generally lacked Gaelic, the sole language of a majority of the parish's inhabitants. Additionally, due to 'adverse influences' adherents were deprived of their place of worship, the Courthouse (the sheriff had declared himself interested in the movement), and, when the privilege was restored, they were refused permission to use candles, an indubitable obstacle during winter months! However, the mission survived and indeed received its first resident missionary, the Reverend Alexander Adam, in March 1842.<sup>534</sup> The Reverend John Ferguson, current Church of Scotland minister in Portree,<sup>535</sup> maintains that the foundation of this church during 'The Ten Years' Conflict' in the Established Church is significant, seemingly suggesting that some folk could not wait to see if the church of their fathers would throw off the inhibiting shackles of the state.

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<sup>534</sup> Mackinnon, the Reverend Donald (?1906), pp.24-25.

<sup>535</sup> Interview with the Reverend Dr. John Ferguson, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2001.

Although, as in Tain, no evidence has been uncovered relating to pre-Disruption congregational size, information is available concerning the mission's continued existence, information tending to offer conflicting impressions of its influence in the community. The first church <sup>536</sup> was opened on 10th June 1860, 'when the collection "out of the deep poverty of the people" was £8. Sitzings in the church numbered 250 and on 11th June 1861 a congregation of ten members was formed, the Reverend Adam being inducted as minister on 24th September 1862.<sup>537</sup> The size of the initial collection, £8 being a considerable sum for persons of limited means to have raised at the time, plus the number of sittings in the church tend to suggest a fairly high level of interest in this 'voluntary' denomination, even after the Free Church was formed. It would also suggest a reasonably strong level of pre-Disruption interest, a supposition certainly not negating the impact of evangelical preaching, as such doctrinal messages would have been in tune with the Secession Church and affirm dissatisfaction with the current Establishment. However, the number forming the initial congregation seemingly contradicts this notion, although lack of further evidence precludes more definitive statements, the exact interpretation of 'membership' being the key issue.

A few families in the parish would have attended worship in the Episcopal Chapel at Caroy. Hints that dissatisfaction with the Establishment was in some cases heading in this direction emerged in 1836, when several men, principally retired military figures, met to 'consider the possibility of building an Episcopal Church.' That same summer an Episcopalian clergyman sent to investigate the situation in Skye discovered a number of scattered families and individuals who associated in groups for worship on Sundays, using the book of 'Common Prayer' and many of whom 'read Morning Prayer each morning and Evening Prayer each

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<sup>536</sup> Ferguson, the Reverend Dr. John (n.d.), p.114.

<sup>537</sup> Mackinnon, the Reverend Donald (?1906), p.25.



night.' Several families had been refused baptism by the Reverend Roderick MacLeod in Snizort and were delighted at the opportunity afforded by the visiting cleric.<sup>538</sup>

The chapel was sited in a location in Bracadale parish reasonably accessible to as many interested parties as possible, including adherents from Portree parish, and was consecrated on 24th June 1838 by the Reverend David Low, Bishop of Ross and Argyll. Eleven 'persons were consecrated' in the chapel on the same day.<sup>539</sup> Initially the scattered congregation was served by a young deacon, the Reverend William Greig, his elevation to the priesthood occurring in 1843<sup>540</sup> (it could be argued that the timing was deliberate in order to give his authority greater weight at a time of ecclesiastical schism). The church, seating eighty souls, seems to have been well attended,<sup>541</sup> although each parish, including Portree, would have contained few folk of the Episcopalian persuasion. Indeed, although a desire to build the church at Portree had been voiced,<sup>542</sup> it seems unlikely that it would have served sufficient numbers. Episcopalianism basically had minimal impact on the inhabitants of the parish, lacking the evangelical message which seems to have been the solution to and focus of their spiritual needs.

### **Strath.**

Strath came under the influence of the Baptists. The first Baptist church on Skye, at Uig in the parish of Snizort, had been founded about 1808, but the origins of the Broadford Church are less clearly recorded. In 1825 James McQueen was settled as missionary there, although itinerant preachers may have made converts in the parish in the early 1820s. By 1827 McQueen had baptised twenty individuals, but his labours took him further afield through

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<sup>538</sup> Taylor, Lucy Sanderson (undated), pp.17 and 20.

<sup>539</sup> Mackinnon, the Reverend Donald (?1906), p.37.

<sup>540</sup> Taylor, Lucy Sanderson (undated), pp.33-35.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., pp.35-36.

<sup>542</sup> Interview with the Reverend Dr. John Ferguson, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2001.

Skye and nearby mainland parishes, a temporary move to Lochcarron occurring between 1833 and 1836. He was ordained 'elder' (i.e. pastor) of the Broadford Church in 1837, a year after his return, the implication being that either shortly before or at the time of his ordination a 'church had been formally constituted' there. Initially worship was conducted in farmhouses or in the open air, but by 1838 premises had been secured at Sculamus, near Broadford. The building could only accommodate a third to a half of the considerable congregations of the time, which ranged from 400 to 500 souls. Despite the large body of adherents or 'listeners' church membership was only twenty in 1837. However, between 1838 and 1844 numbers did increase, assisted by pre-Disruption revival, membership rising to forty two in 1841 and sixty three in 1844, the highest figure recorded.<sup>543</sup>

Taylor writes enthusiastically about the crowds gathering to hear MacQueen preach in the open air in 1829, adding that he preached at nine or ten different stations within ten miles of his home on weekdays, drawing congregations of between 50 and 120, or even more in the winter, and at fifteen different locations further afield each quarter, where attendance was from 60 to 200 persons.<sup>544</sup>

It may be that the Baptist mission offered folk a taste of the evangelical spirituality which was lacking in the parish church, thus obviating the need to defect to the Free Church. However, there is no supportive evidence to underpin this conjecture. The small membership, however, would tend to suggest that a substantial proportion of 'listeners' remained enrolled in the Established Church, taking the opportunity of hearing enthusiastic preaching at Baptist stations on other occasions.

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<sup>543</sup> Meek, Donald E (1988-1990), pp.333-336.

<sup>544</sup> Taylor, Steve (Summer, 1999), p.6.



### **Summary.**

This section has illustrated that the impact of other denominations on Disruption reaction in the three parishes is somewhat debateable. Although Tain Secession Church could have furnished an outlet for those who were unhappy with the religio-political situation in the Established Church, thereby reducing the numbers entering the Free Church, the available evidence on numbers does not appear to corroborate this. Likewise the Episcopalian chapel utilised by Portree parishioners attracted comparatively few worshippers. The Secession church in Portree seems to have been slightly more significant, perhaps drawing away some stalwarts too impatient to wait for the religio-political entanglements to be resolved in the Establishment. However, the Baptist Church in Strath appears to have had greater influence, although the low level of membership sheds doubt on how many parishioners it actually parted from the Established Church.

### **The Geographical and Physical Settings for Worship.**

The relevance of this field of enquiry to the topic of the investigation and the research questions it engenders is unquestionable. Access to a place of worship and a clergyman would have affected perceptions of religion and its position within the cultural framework of an individual's everyday life.

Distance constituted a considerable hurdle to worship in many Highland parishes, due to their extensive areas and difficult terrain. However, the parishes of Easter Ross, including Tain, were not so severely hampered as many other communities, such as Portree and Strath. Tain's relative compactness and low-lying terrain, intimated earlier, would have assisted the passage of worshippers.

**Tain.**

No information has emerged regarding any other place of worship in Tain apart from the burgh church. Although absence of evidence should not be interpreted as conclusive proof that all parishioners worshipped in the one building, it seems likely that at least one of the numerous sources describing Tain parish church would have included reference to another place of worship had it existed. Additionally the parish register of births notes that more babies were 'baptised before the congregation' in a sample year of 1835 than had been born in the burgh.<sup>545</sup> Again, the opportunity presented itself to mention a separate church – but such reference is lacking.

The Church's popularity is reflected in the fact that a new church had to be erected in 1815, with increased accommodation for the congregation. The old building had only held 720 folk.<sup>546</sup> The new edifice seated 1,200 people (nearly half the contemporary population of the parish). However, the problem of catering for two linguistic groups led to a suggestion that the former St. Duthus Church, then disused, could be utilised in order to provide a 'commodious place of worship for the Gaelic congregation.' The two linguistic groups were apparently both 'demanding attention equal to what a single congregation would require.....' By 1837 it was reported that the Established Church was attended by 'all the families in the parish,' apart from the few patronising a Secession Chapel in a nearby parish.<sup>547</sup>

As indicated earlier, although Tain's church did not enjoy geographical centrality, it was located in the parish's commercial and cultural focus. It did not share the same handicaps of distance and difficult topography that affected the parish of Portree, which likewise had a focus in its principal village.

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<sup>545</sup> Old Parish Register, Parish of Tain, 82/4.

<sup>546</sup> Munro, R.W. and Munro, Jean (1966), p.104.

<sup>547</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.296-297.



## Portree.

The creation of this parish from the large and unwieldy parish of Snizort had undoubtedly produced some benefit in attempts to spread the Word more widely, but its configuration precluded efficient operation of the role. Such a factor may well have contributed to the success of lay preachers and the revivals with which they were associated.

Lord Teignmouth, touring in the late 1820s, observes: ‘The parish of Portree contains two other places of worship besides the church, and as the minister performs service here on three Sundays out of five, it occurs only once in the five at each of the other stations.’<sup>548</sup> The implication for attempts by residents of outlying townships to give the church a position of centrality in their lives is obvious. The minister acknowledged this problem in the early 1840s, contending that the parish church, situated in the village of Portree, was in an inconvenient location, being fifteen miles from the ‘southern extremity of the parish’ and consequently ‘inaccessible to the great body of the people.’ He refers to other preaching stations, where attendance fluctuated between 300 and 400 souls, but unfortunately fails to identify the locations.<sup>549</sup> He does not even mention the problems facing the inhabitants of the associated islands. Although the fact that the island’s proprietor at the Disruption reserved for the sole use of the Free Church the edifice constructed for the Establishment<sup>550</sup> registers the existence of a church on Raasay, this would still have been inaccessible to much of that island’s population, as well as those on Rona and the smaller islands.

Even the building in Portree was initially woefully inadequate for the role it was attempting to fulfil. Correspondence between 1816 and 1818 refers to the application for a suitable parish church, a letter from the Presbytery’s solicitor, dated 28th June 1818 recording that this need

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<sup>548</sup> Teignmouth, Lord (1836), p.148.

<sup>549</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.232.

<sup>550</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1977), pp.186-187.

had been felt for fifteen years.<sup>551</sup> The building specifications and the financial contributions of the heritors caused much dispute, MacLeod of Raasay refusing to support an edifice which distance precluded his tenants from using.<sup>552</sup> Although no details have materialised concerning the actual construction, a new church was 'erected in 1824.'<sup>553</sup> This replacement for a building in a 'ruinous state,' 'dangerous to convene in' and inadequate to accommodate the needs of the people in that part of the parish<sup>554</sup> was confirmed in 1841. Accommodating 800 sitters, it was declared to be in an 'excellent state of repair.'<sup>555</sup>

This limited church provision in such a scattered parish undoubtedly created difficulties in the dissemination of the Word. The minister, as intimated above, would attempt to reduce the consequent inequality of opportunity by holding open-air services in other parts of the parish, as would missionary ministers when available. The township of Torran, for example, near the north end of Raasay, was in regular use as a preaching station during the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>556</sup> Despite many inhabitants of the parish travelling great distances to hear the Gospel, adverse *weather would often militate against their attendance.*<sup>557</sup>

### Strath.

Strath parishioners faced similar distance problems. During the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth the parish church was situated at Kilchrist in the Swordale valley, a somewhat remote location, far from the numerous townships at both west and east ends of the parish. The building utilised was the pre-Reformation chapel<sup>558</sup> which was in such a ruinous condition by 1838 that services could no longer be held in it. Additionally, its

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<sup>551</sup> Lord Macdonald Papers, GD 221, 1744.

<sup>552</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/33/2, eg. pp.248-249,329-330 and 331-332.

<sup>553</sup> MacDermid, Gordon E.(1967), p.87.

<sup>554</sup> Presbytery of Skye Records, CH2/330/2, pp.243-244.

<sup>555</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.232.

<sup>556</sup> Sharpe, Richard (1978), p.225.

<sup>557</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), p.232.

<sup>558</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), p.29.



inadequate size had meant that services sometimes had to be held outdoors.<sup>559</sup> A traveller, whose work was published in 1841, confirms this situation, noting that both services, Gaelic and English, were held in the open air.<sup>560</sup> She experienced a warm summer's day, but the effects of harsh winter conditions on attendance and concentration can only be surmised!

The painful inadequacy of the church building led to the decision to move it, both the size of the population and its distribution being determining factors.<sup>561</sup> The Reverend John Mackinnon, parish minister at the time, confirmed the contemporary inappropriateness of Kilchrist as a location and affirmed that the new church in Broadford would accommodate 600, treble the previous number of sittings.<sup>562</sup> The Inverness Courier reported the laying of the foundation stone on 31st March 1840 by Mackinnon the younger of Corry, one of the prominent tacksmen.<sup>563</sup> It was an important event for the parish and attended with due ceremony.

Lamont considers that the actual flitting of the congregation was insignificant, but that 'it marked the crucial stage in our transition from the rough past into our modern civilization,' a time of considerable change in the lives of Strath inhabitants. Not only was the new church 'better, brighter and larger,' but it also reflected a 'new age broader in outlook, brighter in many ways, but more prosaic and more mercenary than the romantic age now drawing to a close,' an age noted for such elements as 'heroism and superstition.'<sup>564</sup> It is a viewpoint tending to smack of Moderatism with overtones of a lingering romanticism.

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid. (1981), pp.182-183.

<sup>560</sup> Sinclair, Catherine (1841), p.204.

<sup>561</sup> Maclean, Allan (1989), p.4.

<sup>562</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1845), pp.306 and 312.

<sup>563</sup> Barron, James (1907), p.272.

<sup>564</sup> Lamont, the Reverend D. (1984), pp.148 and 153-154.

Lord Cockburn, attending worship at Broadford in 1841, observed a congregation of about 350, 'all except Corry's party in the humblest rank.'<sup>565</sup> The social composition was hardly surprising in the light of the picture painted in the previous chapter, but the numbers were disappointing considering the size of the new building and the total population. Apart from a possible apathy, a significant contributory factor could well have been distance, the new church building being at the eastern extremity of this large parish, thus hindering the dissemination of the Word. The minister attempted to reduce the consequent *inequality of opportunity* by holding services elsewhere in the parish, there being two other places utilised, where worship occurred in the open air on fine days or in a tenant's hut during inclement weather. Sadly not everyone would have been able to follow the minister into such small premises.<sup>566</sup> At Strathaird, in the west of the parish, services were conducted in the 'cavity of a rock'<sup>567</sup> the clergyman preaching from this 'recess in the basalt crags, with a grassy slope in front on which his congregation sat to hear him.'<sup>568</sup> By 1839 the proprietors, the MacAlisters, had built a chapel in that district, enabling worship in some degree of comfort to be made available to the small communities there,<sup>569</sup> services being held every third Sunday.<sup>570</sup>

### Summary.

The foregoing passages have highlighted the topographical and physical problems of accessibility to worship experienced by Portree and Strath parishioners in comparison with the relative attainability of church services for their counterparts in Tain. Consequently the

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<sup>565</sup> Cooper, Derek (1970), p.183.

<sup>566</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1979), pp.29-30.

<sup>567</sup> MacDermid, Gordon E. (1967), p.90.

<sup>568</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), p.60.

<sup>569</sup> MacKinnon, Neil (1981), p.183.

<sup>570</sup> Geikie, Sir Archibald (1906), p.59.



dissemination of the Word by the ministers of these parishes would have been attended by differential opportunities to respond from a purely practical point of view.

The undoubtedly significant religious history of the parishes and the more debateable influence of other denominations, together with the physical settings for worship have been seen to contribute to differential experiences prior to the Disruption. However, before examining other aspects of the daily lives of parishioners there are further vital elements of the religious background to be addressed, specifically those concerning influential bodies and individuals. The next chapter will investigate the input of church courts and church employees, especially the ministers, and finally the role of laymen.